RANCH ROMANCES

Still 15¢ Only

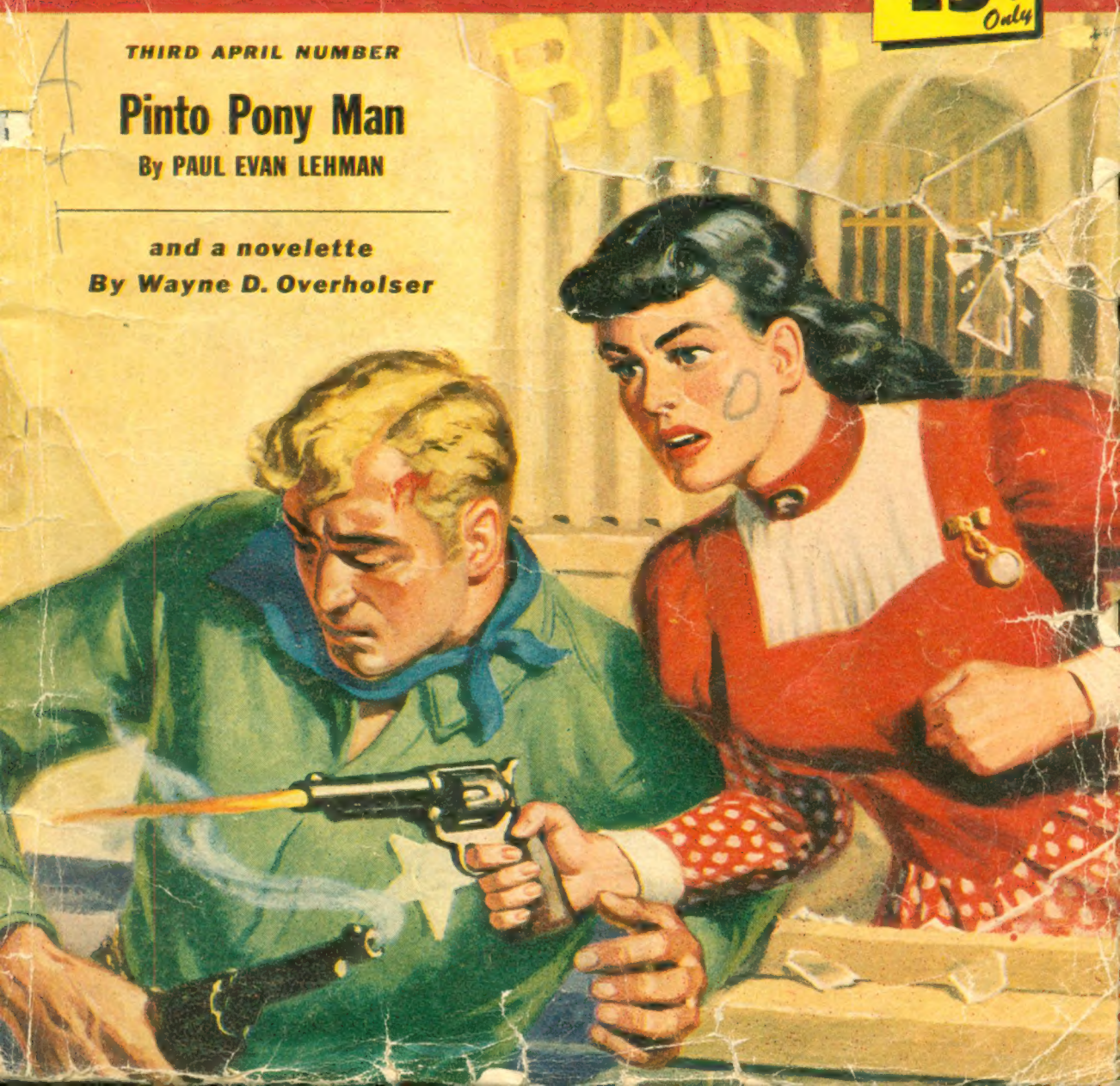
THIRD APRIL NUMBER

Pinto Pony Man

By PAUL EVAN LEHMAN

and a novelette

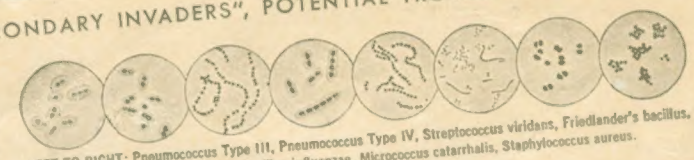
By Wayne D. Overholser



Get after GERMS before they get after you!

"SECONDARY INVADERS", POTENTIAL TROUBLEMAKERS

These are some types of the threatening germs that can cause so much of the misery of a cold when they invade the body through throat membranes.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Pneumococcus Type III, Pneumococcus Type IV, Streptococcus viridans, Friedlander's bacillus, Streptococcus hemolyticus, Bacillus influenzae, Micrococcus catarrhalis, Staphylococcus aureus.

Tests made during a 12 year period showed
FEWER COLDS, MILDER COLDS
for twice-a-day users of
LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC

At the first sign of a COLD or SORE THROAT

Gargle LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC

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Listerine Antiseptic quickly kills millions of threatening germs called "secondary invaders"... the very ones that many authorities hold responsible for much of the misery of a cold.

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LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

A Miss for Mr. Wastebasket

Dear Editor:

This is my third attempt to slip by Mr. Wastebasket. I want somebody to take pity on me, because I'll be in a convalescent home all winter after two operations. How I'd love to hear from women, especially near my age—42—and especially mothers—I have nine children. Three of my family are married, and I have a son in Japan in the army. I love writing letters, sewing, flowers of all kinds. I collect little shoes and some stamps.

MRS. REGIS FOWLER

Paw Paw, W. Va.

Just One More

Dear Editor:

Do you have room in your magazine for one more letter from a farm girl? I am 16 years old, have brown hair, blue eyes and I'm about 5'3". I'm interested in hearing from boys and girls all over the world.

MARIAN NORTH

Naples, N. Y.

Eight Young Salts

Dear Editor:

We are eight British Naval Ratings, all ardent readers of RANCH ROMANCES. Please publish our letter, as we would like to contact pen pals in either Canada or the good old USA—preferably girls. We are all between the ages of 20 and 25, and at present we are in a fairly isolated place and we would appreciate stacks of mail. Just write to the undersigned, who will share all your letters around with the rest of the Stokers' Mess.

A. JONES

Sto/Mechs. Mess
H.M.S Moorpout
c/o Fleet Mail Office
Bermuda

Range Riders Requested

Dear Editor:

Won't some of your Western-loving guys and gals write to me? I'm 18, 5'7" tall, medium-brown hair and blue eyes. I love to ride horseback, and I have since I was four years old, so you range riders are especially requested to write. My hobbies are reading, writing letters, collecting Western songs and statues of horses. I'll send snaps to the writers of the first 25 letters I get.

MARTHE NELSON

Box 57
Donalda, Alta.
Canada

Air Mail for the Air Force

Dear Editor:

I'm in the Air Force, and I sure need some new friends. I'm a guy of 21, whose favorite hobby is letter-writing. I also collect post cards and enjoy roller skating.

PFC. ROBERT L. HOFFMAN,
AF 46047803

28 Sta. Medical Group
Rapid City Air Force Base
Weaver, So. Dak.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For 24 years Our Air Mail has been linking the readers of Ranch Romances. You may write directly to anyone whose letter is published, if you uphold the wholesome spirit of Ranch Romances.

Our Air Mail is intended for those who really want correspondents. Be sure to sign your own name. Address letters for publication to Our Air Mail, Ranch Romances, 515 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

From the Heart of the Redwoods

Dear Editor:

I've been a reader of your magazine for a long time, and now I'm wondering if any of your readers would like to write to a fellow out here in the heart of the Redwoods. I'm 28, 6'2", weigh 185, am considered good-looking and have a nice personality. I was in the Army Air Corps during the war. At the present time I'm driving a truck and also doing some flying. I'm interested in all kinds of sports and love the outdoors.

WESTWOOD COPLAND

Ft. Bragg, Calif.

Write—Don't Phone—to Casey

Dear Editor:

I hold an interesting position in a wholesale drug house, and I do a great deal of telephone work. However, it leaves little time for outside contacts, and this is my primary reason for seeking pen pals. I'm a young woman of 23, brown eyes, light hair and a ready smile for my pals. My activities outside working hours are bowling in two different leagues, shuffleboard, sketching, designing and sewing. Don't try pronouncing my name—you'll be sorry! And tongue-tied! My friends call me Casey.

CASEMERA DLUGOKECKI

1228 N. Greenview
Chicago 22, Ill.

Lots of Letters for Lewis

Dear Editor:

I'm 18 years old, 6' tall with brown hair and blue eyes. I live on a farm with my folks. I'm crippled from a car accident I was in, but I love to read and write, so come on, EVERYBODY, and write me a few lines.

LEWIS ALLEN

Warsaw, Mo.

THIRD APRIL NUMBER

April 29, 1949
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ON SALE EVERY OTHER FRIDAY

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ELTINGE F. WARNER, *President* ELMER J. CHAMBERS, *Treasurer* FANNY ELLSWORTH, *Secretary*

TRAIL DUST

THIS DEPARTMENT will endeavor to cut sign on some of the colorful happenings of today's West and haze the stuff along to you—twentieth century trail dust, stirred up by folks in the cow country.

A MINE in Central City, Colo., will soon become a museum piece, even though it's far from worked out. The famous Coeur d'Alene will be opened to visitors during the Central City Festival in July. It will be the first underground memorial to the mining industry, completely equipped to show all the methods of turning gold, silver and lead ores into precious metals—from the primitive processes of the first, wild bonanza days up to the most modern ones.

YOU'D think if any creature under the sun were immune to the odiferous fumes of tear gas, it would be the skunk. Tain't so. Local authorities in Clive, Ia., using tear gas, finally routed a family of skunks from the basement of a home there, but the family of humans was hardier. They continued to live in their own house, but after a week of being shunned by their neighbors were beginning to wonder if maybe they shouldn't bring back the polecats to get rid of the gas.

THIS one is Eastern in geography but Western in spirit. A man in Illinois strode through the batwing doors of a saloon, demanded a drink and slammed a bagful of gold down on the bar. Times have changed though, pardner, because the man got no redeye, but instead a trip to jail for disturbing the peace.

ADVANCE FASHION NOTE: Nylon will be high style for Navajos next summer, and milady's wardrobe will run to bright yellow—courtesy of Uncle Sam's parachutes which dropped supplies to stormbound tribes during the winter.

BY THE TIME you read this, a cat in the state of Washington will have had kittens—or chickens—or both. Her name is Mitzi, and being an expectant mother with no desire to gadabout she amicably accepted her owner's suggestion that she settle down on a couple of orphan eggs. During the first 18 days, she seemed to take to setting like a hen, but folks thereabouts were doubtful that she'd take to her unexpected offspring like one.

TWO-LEGGED SNAKES do their dirty work all over the world, but trust the West to come up with the genuine article. A man in New Mexico caught the critter, not a human, but a real six-foot rattler with one leg on each side near the rattles.

FINAL winter-of-'49 notes: A man in Missouri kept his sheep from slipping on the ice by putting socks on their feet. . . . Firemen in New Mexico had to build a bonfire to keep warm while they battled a blazing home. . . . Not only was the Northwest winter the worst in history, but every day of it was longer according to the clocks there. The power shortage forced authorities to lower frequencies and that made electric clocks run slow. . . . A cow in Nebraska went 33 days without food and lived to browse knee deep in fodder after she was rescued.

THE PAINT horse couldn't change its colors, and Ken Randall, who rode the oddly marked piebald, found himself just as indelibly marked a murderer

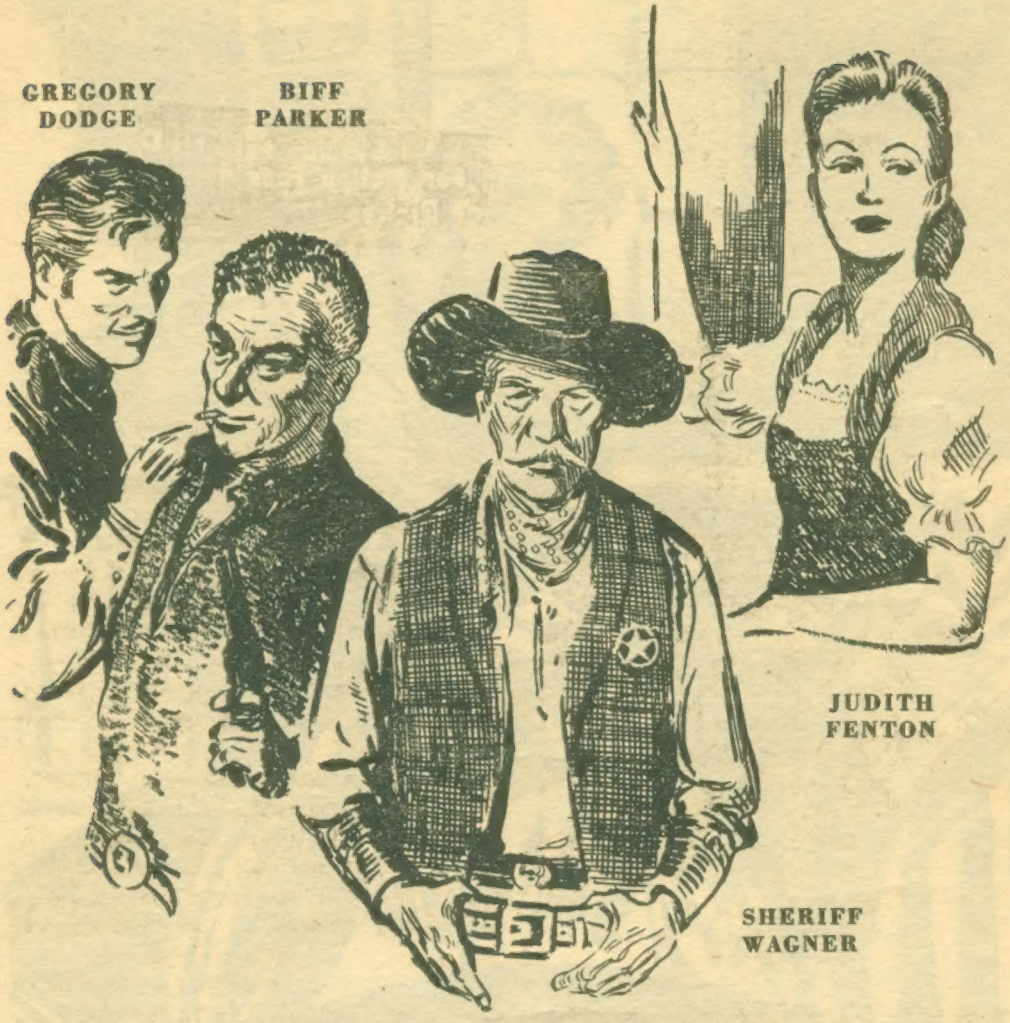
KEN RANDALL was riding fast through the twilight knowing that Sage could be only a few miles distant. The road ran through a patch of trees and their branches obscured the skyline. Suddenly he was caught squarely on the chest and torn from the saddle as though by the sweep of a gigantic arm, and he landed on his back with such force that consciousness left him instantly.

When he blinked open his eyes he lay still for a moment, fully aware of what had happened but gripped by a numbness that left him disinclined to move. A lariat had been stretched chest high across the trail, and it hadn't been put there to hold up the scenery. Somebody had set a trap for him and he had rushed right into it.

He felt for the gun at his hip and found it still in its holster. The movement of his arm brought pain, which increased when he slowly pushed himself to a

Pinto Pony Man

By PAUL EVAN LEHMAN



sitting position. He had to turn over on his hands and knees to get to his feet. He stood swaying as he searched his pockets. Everything was gone—wallet, the letter in his inside coat pocket, tobacco, matches, jackknife, watch—everything. The thief hadn't left him a penny.

He peered about him through the gathering gloom. His horse was gone; he was alone on the trail. The lariat no longer stretched across the road. There was but one thing to do and he did it. He started walking towards Sage.

The trees thinned and gave way to open range, and some fifty yards ahead of him he saw a horse. The animal was grazing, and as he drew near he saw that it was fully rigged. It was a pinto with peculiar markings on its right hip. In the middle of the dirty white background was a brown half moon and six inches from it was a small spot that might have been a star. Nobody who'd seen that horse once would fail to recognize it again.

Ken had no trouble catching it. It had been ridden hard, and that fact explained the reason for the trap. Its rider wanted a fresh horse, and while he was securing it had helped himself to the rest of Ken's belongings.

Ken eased his aching bones and muscles into saddle and set out for Sage, holding

KEN
RANDALL

the pinto to a walk. In Sage he would hunt up the marshal and report the robbery. He didn't think that would help much, for he hadn't seen the man who had robbed him. If the fellow still had Ken's horse, he could be identified by the animal, but the chances were that he'd change it for another at the first opportunity. The outlook wasn't a pleasant one at all.

It was quite dark by the time he rode into Sage, but two kerosene flares blazed above the doorway of a large two-story building a short distance down the street. The upstairs was brightly lighted and people in store clothes were entering. Ken caught the wail of a fiddle and knew that a dance was in progress. The place looked like a town hall. so he rode towards it.

A man came out and stood in the doorway. He was a big, substantially built man with grey hair and big white mustaches, and when he moved Ken caught the glint of a metal badge. A lawman of some kind; well, this was the man Ken wanted to see. He reined the pinto into the half circle of light which flooded the street.

He saw the officer glance at him and raised his hand to get his attention. Then he jerked the pinto to an abrupt halt. The change in the lawman's face alarmed and warned him. He could not mistake the ferocity and hatred that leaped across space at him. And as the change came the officer crouched and reached for his gun.

Ken wheeled the pinto and struck him with the spurs. The horse leaped forward as the gun roared and Ken felt the breath of the slug on his neck. He leaned forward in the saddle, spurring the pinto again. The shadows were reaching for him when he felt a blow on his left shoulder that nearly knocked him out of the saddle. The shock was followed by a numbness in his whole left side.

Wonder and indignation gripped him at the unwarranted attack, but faded as the reason reached him. It was the pinto. The star and crescent. Its owner must have ben a criminal of some sort and the officer had recognized it and had started shooting on sight.

The pinto thundered past the last house in Sage and Ken found himself in a broad valley. There were hills bounding it on this side, and he could see the tops of others against the sky on the far side. The pinto seemed to be following a road, and Ken let him have his head.

His left arm hung limply. He took the reins into his right hand, then raised the useless forearm and thrust it into his coat, buttoning the garment so as to hold it as in a sling. He noticed that blood was trickling from the numb fingers.

He didn't know where he was headed, but when he drew rein momentarily he heard the roll of hoofs behind and knew the officer was pursuing him. He seemed to have been riding for hours when he saw a pinpoint of light ahead.

His ears were ringing and his vision was going when the horse broke stride and he found himself in the yard of a ranch house. The door was open and light streamed out from the kitchen. Somebody was standing in the doorway. The pinto slowed to a walk, and he sagged forward in the saddle. He heard a woman's voice cry, "You're hurt!"

He said, "Yes, ma'am," and then darkness momentarily engulfed him.

JUDITH FENTON leaped forward and caught him as he fell, managing to support the upper half of him so that he landed on his feet. The shock awakened him. He staggered back against the horse and muttered, "Sorry."

She noticed that he was a good-looking young man, with curly brown hair and blue eyes fringed with thick dark lashes; but now his face was pinched and drawn and the eyes were clouded with weakness. The sweat of exhaustion was on his forehead and his left arm hung limply at his side. His coat on that side was wet and soggy and blood was dripping from the ends of his fingers.

And then she stiffened as another sound reached her. More hoof beats, also rapid. In a flash she understood. This man was a fugitive heading for Cowthief Canyon and the law was close on his heels. The thought momentarily sickened Judith, for she had no use for the outlaws who found sanctuary in the narrow canyon which led through the hills. She knew she should keep him here until the law arrived, but he didn't look like a criminal and he was so utterly helpless.

She said, "Can you make it to the barn?"

He said he'd try, so she caught his right wrist and drew his arm over her shoulder, then put her arm about his waist. Half-supporting, half-dragging him, she led him into the barn and let him sag down in a corner. By the way he collapsed she knew he had lost consciousness.

She hurried outside. There was no time to lose; the pursuing hoof beats were drawing closer and the pony must be disposed of. She leaped into the saddle and kicked the pinto sharply. He started sluggishly, but she used her heels and voice to get him back into stride.

She headed directly for the gap in the hills which formed the entrance to Cowthief Canyon, cutting across a corner of the 66 ranch to the bank of the stream which emerged from the canyon. The walls towered steeply on both sides as she entered the narrow cleft, and she couldn't see her hand before her face. At the end of a couple hundred yards the pinto stopped abruptly, throwing up its head, and she knew she had reached the barrier which blocked the trail.

A voice challenged, "Who is it?"

"Judith Fenton. There's a man back at my ranch. He's hurt and somebody's chasing him. I hid him, but this pinto would give him away. Take it and give me something to ride back on." She spoke curtly, annoyed with herself that she must dicker with outlaws.

Presently she heard the clink of iron shoes on stone, then the grating of the gate's huge hinges. She dismounted and stood waiting, holding the pinto by the bit. A rough hand brushed hers, and leather was thrust into her fingers. The voice said, "Fetch him back tomorrer and tie him to the gate."

She moved away at a walk until she heard a horse enter the canyon mouth, then crowded the horse close to the rocky wall. The horseman passed her so close that she could have reached out and touched him. When he had gone she rode on, and when she reached the open range she put the horse to a canter.

When Judith reached the ranch house she off-saddled and turned the horse into a corral. She went into the barn and knelt by the still form in the corner. The man was sleeping or was unconscious. She felt his pulse and found it weak and rapid.

She set to work cleansing the wound, and while she was working the man opened his eyes. He smiled faintly and said, "I'm an awful lot of bother."

"You are," she agreed tartly. "And I'm going to get rid of you like I would a hot potato."

"Where's the pinto?"

"I rode him to Cowthief Canyon. They're keeping him for you."

"I reckon you ought to know—" he began, but she interrupted him.

"I don't want to know anything. Not a thing."

He said no more and she put compresses saturated with antiseptic on the wound and bound them in place with a bandage. She helped him on with his coat, gathered her materials together and put out the lantern.

"Stay here and keep perfectly quiet," she warned. "Save your strength; you're going to need it."

SHE WENT back to the house, disposed of the bloody water and other things, then washed carefully. There was some blood on her woolen shirt so she went to her room and changed it. She had just finished when she heard the plod of hoofs and a few seconds later somebody knocked on the kitchen door.

She went to it and opened it and the light showed her a big, broad man with grey hair and white mustaches. His eyes were dark and smouldering. He came in and she closed the door. He said, "Who are you, Miss?"

"Judith Fenton. I own the Box F."

"Where's your father and mother?"

"Mother died when I was six. Dad died just a year ago."

He said, "That's too bad. Reckon it leaves you pretty lonely. Where's everybody?"

"The crew went to Sage, every one of them including the cook. There's a big dance tonight. Won't you sit down, Mr.—"

"Sheriff Wagner, of Redrock County." He seated himself and Judith took a chair facing him. He went on: "I chased a bank robber past your place a short while ago. When I got here the back door was open but nobody was in the house. Where were you?"

"Outside. This man rode up while I was out there. He was on a pinto with markings that looked like a star and a crescent."

"That's the jasper. What become of him?"

"Horse and—rider went on towards Cowthief Canyon."

"So that's what they call it, huh? Tried to get in but some sort of barrier's been built there. What sort of place is it?"

"It's an outlaw sanctuary, run by a crook named Biff Parker. He's built barriers across the trail at both ends of the canyon, and keeps a guard there. Everybody knows about the place, but nobody dares try to clean it out. Too many people would be killed."

"And there's no way into that basin except by the canyon?"

"There may be a trail through the mountains, but a man might wander around for weeks without finding it."

Sheriff Wagner got up. "We'll see about that. I don't aim to let this feller get away from me. I been chasin' him for three days, but he holed up on me night before last, and I got to Sage ahead of him. I had a hunch and waited there. He rode in tonight and I got a few shots at him and I think one of 'em hit him."

"It did. He was about ready to fall out of the saddle when I saw him. But, Sheriff, why was he riding such a peculiarly marked horse?"

"When he came out of the bank he couldn't get to his own. He had to take the first one he come to, and it happened to be that pinto. I pressed him so close that he didn't have time to ditch it and get another one. Well, I'll be on my way. Sorry to have bothered you, Miss Fenton."

He went outside and Judith followed him. As he settled into the saddle she said, "You told me you're Sheriff of Redrock County. Aren't you a bit off your reservation?"

"Yes, Miss, I sure am. Over here I'm just a plain citizen. That's the way I want it. I don't aim to arrest this jigger when I meet up with him. I'm goin' to shoot him like he was a mad dog. You see, when he held up that bank he killed the cashier. That cashier happened to be my son-in-law."

He nodded and rode away, leaving Judith looking after him, stunned by what he had told her. The man in the barn was a murderer! She opened her mouth to call after

him but he had vanished in the darkness and the beat of hoofs would have drowned out her cry.

She went to the corral, saddled the borrowed horse and led him to the barn and tied him. She went inside and said sharply, "Are you awake?"

"Yes, Miss, and feeling lots better, thanks to you."

"Can you ride?"

"If I take it easy." She heard little movements and knew that he was struggling to his feet. He moved slowly along the wall and she saw his silhouette in the doorway.

She walked past him and untied the horse, turning it so that its left side was towards him. He grasped the horn and after several futile attempts succeeded in lifting himself into the saddle. He looked down at her and said, "I'm thanking you for helping me. That officer would have shot me on sight. And I haven't done a thing except ride into Sage on the wrong horse."

"Aren't you overlooking the bank cashier you shot in Redrock County?" she asked tartly. "Now get out. Cowthief Canyon is where the creek come out. When they ask you who you are, tell them that Judith Fenton sent you and that you're returning the horse."

She turned abruptly and went into the house, not even answering his good night.

HE RODE away slowly, holding the horn to keep from falling off. His muscles were like water and he felt light-headed and dizzy. He came at last to the creek and turned towards the hills, coming presently to the entrance to the canyon. He plunged into its black depths, leaving it to the horse to find the way. It moved ahead confidently for a couple hundred yards then came to a halt. A voice challenged, "Who is it now?"

"Judith Fenton sent me. I guess this horse belongs to you."

He heard the squeak of hinges, and the horse moved ahead of its own accord. The voice ordered, "Pull up," and Ken waited while the gate was being closed and locked. He heard the guard approach. "You the feller she mentioned, the one who was hurt?"

"I reckon I am."

"You'll want to hide out. Ride straight ahead until the canyon widens. You'll see a light in the house. Tell Biff to put up the hoss. That's who you want to see—Biff Parker."

Ken said thanks and rode on. After a couple hundred yards the walls receded and he could see the sky, bright with stars. By their light he saw a great bowl-shaped area and off to his left a cluster of buildings. There was a light burning in one of these, and he rode over to it and slid off the horse's back. He walked up on the porch and knocked on the door. It opened and he saw a tall, sad-faced man with sharp little eyes. The man said, "Yeah?"

"Judith Fenton sent me here. I got myself plugged and I've got to hole up for a while. The guard said to put up his horse."

"Reckon you're the feller the pinto belongs to, ain't you?"

"I was riding him when the law jumped me."

"Come in and take the weight off'n your feet."

Ken walked unsteadily into the room and leaned against the wall. Four men were seated at a table playing cards. They eyed him curiously and one of them said, "Better git somethin' under him, Biff, or he'll cave in on you."

Biff said, "Can you make it to the next room?"

Using the wall to steady him, Ken went through a doorway into a room with two chairs and a pair of bunks. He sat down on one of the bunks and Biff closed the door and turned to face him.

Biff said, "You got any money?"

"No. Somebody rolled me and took everything. Even my tobacco."

Biff's eyebrows said he didn't believe it. "Get out of your clothes and into the bunk. I'll help you."

Ken awoke at noon and felt so good that he got up and dressed. He went into the kitchen where Biff was preparing dinner and Biff said, "Feelin' better, huh?"

Ken rounded the pile of rocks and then came to an abrupt halt

He ate dinner with Biff and the four outlaws. They were an unsavory bunch, roughly dressed, coarse-talking and hard as nails. They accepted him as one of them and asked no questions. One of them said to Biff, "Heard in Sage that the lawman headed into the hills to hunt a way into the canyon."

Biff was not disturbed. "Let him hunt. Keep him outa mischief."

When Ken had finished eating Biff said, "Go out and git yourself some air. You'll have to walk. I got rid of the pinto. He's too hot to have around."

Ken walked about the park, noticing the high walls and realizing why Biff was not concerned about the sheriff finding a way into the place. He could see but one trail which angled down from the heights, and anybody using it would stand out against the grey cliff like a fly in a saucer of milk.

He went back to the house and sat down on the steps, and presently he saw a rider approaching from the direction of the barrier. He rode up to the house and dismounted, and Ken saw that he was a well built man of thirty or so, dark of hair and eye and wearing an expensive cowman's outfit. He gave Ken a casual glance and went past him and into the house. He talked with Biff for some time, then came out, mounted his horse and rode back towards the barrier.

AFTER a while Ken got up and strolled down to the canyon, noticing as he left the bowl the high walls which were so close that only a narrow strip of sky showed at their tops. He stopped within sight of the barrier. A wall of rock had been built across the trail and there was a massive narrow gate set in it. Poles had been driven into the creek bed and strung with many strands of barbed wire. The guard sat on a pinnacle of rock which permitted him to look over the wall and cover the approach.

When Ken returned to the house he was tired. He stretched out on the bunk and slept until suppertime.

He ate again with Biff and the four outlaws, and when the meal was finished Biff said to Ken, "Let's go outside a minute." Ken followed him out, wondering what was coming. Biff said, "Think you can ride to Sage?"

"I reckon so. Why?"

"Got a job for you. Gotta be done tonight. You want to tackle it?"

Ken thought swiftly. Whatever this job was, he must undertake it. He hadn't a dime, hadn't even a horse. The very tobacco he was smoking had been furnished by Biff, together with the shirt and coat. He said, "I'll try it."

"Pretty good with a gun, ain't you?"

Ken felt a little shock of apprehension. "Well, I don't know."

"I figger you are. From what I hear you must be. Now this is what you're to do. You'll ride to Sage and look for a man. He's about your height but a mite thinner, dark hair wore sorta long, mustache, thin face and pale blue eyes. Got on levis and a blue coat and black Stetson hat. Wears two guns, tied down. He's registered at the hotel as John Davis. You oughta be able to find him easy enough."

"And when I do?"

"Why, when you find him you kill him."

Ken experienced a shock almost as great as that of the sheriff's bullet, but remembering that he was supposed to be a bold, tough killer he tried not to show the reaction on his face. He drawled, "Some job!"

"Not too bad. He's a two-gun artist, but you don't have to take chances; the feller got business at the 66 ranch. Tell him Gregory Dodge of the 66 sent you to town for him. When you get him out in the valley you can slip behind him and let him have it. But be sure of one thing. He got a letter in his inside coat pocket addressed to Gregory Dodge. You can have anything else he got on him, but fetch that letter back to me."

"A letter adressed to Gregory Dodge," repeated Ken. The blood was pumping through his veins, and it was hard to keep his voice steady. He said to cover up, "What's in it for me?"

"Whatever you find on him and your board and keep. Feel up to it?"

DID HE feel up to it! That letter addressed to Gregory Dodge simplified everything. For that was the letter he had been carrying, the letter which had been stolen from him. And the man who had it must be the one who had set the trap for him along the trail, the real murderer of the bank cashier that Judith Fenton had mentioned!

Ken said grimly, "I'll take care of him. You better give me some money. I might have to buy some drinks."

"Sure," said Biff, and grudgingly gave Ken two silver dollars.

Ken said, "You hold life sort of cheap, don't you?"

"He oughta have a wad on him. Don't forgit that letter."

Ken went to the corral and walked down a stolid bay with the Ace of Spades on his hip. He cinched on the saddle which had been taken from the pinto and rode down the trail to the barrier. The guard came down from his perch and opened the gate for him. "Comin' back tonight?" the fellow asked.

"If I'm lucky."

"Keno. Just say 'Spades are trump' and whoever's here'll let you in."

Ken rode along the canyon trail and emerged on the open range. Ahead of him he saw a group of buildings which he knew must be headquarters for the 66 ranch. He felt a little thrill of pride. His father had bought the 66 from the Ace Cattle Company and had sent him down to take charge of it. The Ace Cattle Company consisted of a group of Easterners who had conceived the idea that ownership of a cattle ranch spelled a short-cut to riches. They had sent Gregory Dodge out to manage it for them. The sudden wealth not materializing, they had sold out to Ken's father and had written Dodge of the change in ownership, instructing him to hand over the ranch records to Randall's representative.

Gregory Dodge undoubtedly thought that the man who had the letter was Randall's representative, for it must have been Dodge who had visited Biff that afternoon. There was only one reason Dodge should want the representative killed and the letter recovered. He wanted time to cover up a shortage of cash or cattle or both!

It looked to Ken as though he could solve all his problems at once. He would find the man, satisfy himself that he was indeed the one who had robbed him, then ask the marshal at Sage to arrest him. Ken could identify himself by describing the articles the fellow had taken from him, even to the wording of the letter he carried in his pocket. If the man was still riding Ken's horse, the animal would answer Ken's call and that would help. He could wire his father for a detailed description of himself. With such overwhelming proof, his story of the change of horses would be believed, the real bandit would be handed over to the sheriff and Ken would ride out to the 66 and demand an accounting. And instead of scorn and hatred in the eyes of Judith Fenton he would see apology and perhaps friendship.

Ahead of him to his left was the Fenton ranch. It was but a short distance away and on the spur of the moment he reined off the trail and headed for it. The darkness had deepened, and as he approached the buildings he saw light in what was evidently the bunkhouse and another light in the ranch house kitchen. He rode quietly into the yard and dismounted by the steps where just the night before he had tumbled off his horse and into the arms of Judith Fenton. He went up the steps and rapped on the door.

It opened and Judith was staring out at him. He took off his hat and said, "Good evening, Miss Fenton."

She said, "You!" in a low, startled voice and took a backward step in her surprise. He came into the room and stood regarding her, a smile on his lips.

"I didn't get much of a chance to thank you last night," he said. "I thought I'd stop in and do it right."

"I don't want your thanks," she said vehemently. "I hate myself enough as it is. What I did was on impulse and before I knew you were a murderer. Sheriff Wagner told me just as he rode off, and I should have called him back but I was too much of a coward." She made a sharp gesture

towards the door. "Get out. Now. Or I'll call my boys and have them turn you over to the law."

He stood regarding her soberly. He said, "May I speak to your father for a minute?"

"My father is dead. So is my mother. I'm alone except for my crew, who would gladly tear you apart if I raised my voice. I'm giving you a break by letting you go, but you'd better leave before I change my mind."

"I hoped you'd let me explain. Even a—murderer is allowed to tell his story before they convict him. Some day I hope you'll give me the chance to tell mine." He nodded gravely and turned and went out.

Judith followed him to the door, still frowning. She watched as he got into his saddle and rode away. His back was very straight, and he did not turn to look at her again. When he had rounded the corrals Judith came out and sat down on the top step. The frown was still there but it was one of doubt now.

"Maybe I should have let him explain," she said aloud. "The next time I will. Even if he tells a lie I bet it'll be a good one!"

MEANWHILE, Ken rode slowly towards Sage. He was not angry because he knew just how she felt. She thought him a killer and was ashamed of herself for helping him. And somehow the thought that she was alone on that big ranch touched him. Well, after tonight things would be different.

When he reached Sage he rode directly to the hotel and asked for John Davis. Davis, the clerk informed him, had gone out right after supper—he'd probably be in one of the saloons. Ken thanked him and went out. His horse was the only one at the hitching rack, so he went around to the stable. It was dark and empty. Evidently Davis had taken Ken's horse with him. Ken started a round of the saloons in search of the man and found him in the Oasis.

Ken did not spot him at once because the fellow was standing at the bar with his back turned. It was not until Ken became aware of a sharp scrutiny that he glanced at the bar mirror. A face was staring back at him, a face that was thin, with pale blue eyes, mustache, and hair that was worn long. The man had on a black hat, blue coat and levis. Yes, this was the one Biff had described. The fellow obviously recognized him, and believed, his own identiy was safe.

Ken left the saloon and moved along the hitching rail in search of his horse; the animal was not there. He turned into a passageway and followed it to the alley. By the light of a pale moon which had just came up he saw a horse tied at the front of a shed. The horse gave a whinny of welcome and Ken knew the animal was his own even before his fingers had traced the brand on its hip. He rubbed the horse's nose and whispered, "See you later, Son."

He moved away feeling strong and confident. The Marshal, he supposed, would have an office in the Town Hall. He went up the passageway to the street and at the corner of the Oasis halted abruptly. A man had just dismounted and was looking over the doors. Light from within illuminated his heavy face with its keen dark eyes and white mustache. Sheriff Wagner!

Ken drew hastily back into the passageway. Wagner had an itchy trigger finger, and Ken dared not let him see him until somebody had vouched for him. He decided to follow the alley to the Town Hall, hoping to get the ear of the Marshal before Wagner saw him. As he neared the near corner he heard the back door of the Oasis slam. Somebody had come out into the alley.

Ken halted, then went on again, sure that it couldn't be the sheriff. He stepped into the alley and saw movement in the shadows where the horse was tied. He started towards the animal as a man led it away from the shed, and the knowledge that this killer must not escape him caused him to call, "Hold up a minute, Davis!"

The man whirled and dropped the rein, and Ken sensed rather than saw the swift movements of hands towards the guns at his side. Ken threw himself flat, his hand jerking out his own Colt. Orange flame stabbed at him and the roar of a .44 shattered the silence. There on his stomach

he was a sitting duck; the next slug would surely get him. He fired twice. His second shot went into a body that was already sagging towards the ground.

HE STRUGGLED to his feet and ran across the distance which separated them, careless of danger. He had to get that letter. If they found it on the man they would wire Ken's father that his son was dead, and Ken wished to spare him that. He knelt by the still form. The man's coat had fallen back and he saw the edge of an envelope protruding from the inside pocket. He snatched it and thrust it into his own coat. As he got up, the back door of the Oasis opened and he saw the sheriff there. He fired a shot which plunked into the door frame and the sheriff jumped back and slammed the door. He was a brave man but not a foolhardy one.

Boots were thudding in the passageway leading from the front. Ken snatched up the rein and managed to get into the saddle. He spoke to the horse and sent him rushing along the alley, and once on the open range he headed directly for the canyon. He passed Judith Fenton's ranch at a distance and saw the light in the kitchen but he did not leave the trail. This was no time for explanations. This time he really had killed a man.

No time for explanations anywhere, he told himself. He was even worse off than he had been before, for now he would be unable to prove his story by the articles in the possession of the man who had called himself John Davis. They would say he had already examined them.

He rode up the canyon to the barrier, gave the password and was admitted. As he rode up to the house, the door opened and Biff Parker came out on the porch. Biff said, "How'd you make out?"

"I got the letter. And the gent who had it ain't no more."

Biff said, "Good!" and walked with him to the corral. Ken explained about leaving Biff's horse at the hotel, but Biff didn't seem to mind. They went into the house and through the kitchen to the other room. Biff lighted a lamp and closed the door. And then he said, "Let's have the letter."

"Just a minute. I had to leave Sage in a hurry and had no time to search the fellow. All I got was the letter. What'll you give me for it?"

Biff frowned. "I told you you was workin' out your keep."

"The bill isn't that big. Listen, Biff, I've got to have some *dinero*. Gregory Dodge is paying you plenty for this job. I want a cut."

Biff was still scowling. "How much?"

"Fifty bucks."

"Give you twenty-five."

"You'll give me fifty and you'll start digging for it now or the price goes up to a hundred. After all, I can sell it to Dodge."

Biff cursed Ken as he dug, but he dug. He gave Ken the money and Ken handed over the letter. It was of no use to him now.

He slept with his gun that night. Biff would do anything for money, and handing over that fifty dollars was like parting with his right arm. Immediately after breakfast the next morning Ken saddled up and rode along the canyon to the entrance on the far side of the mountains. When the guard opened the gate for him he asked, "Where's the nearest town? And I don't mean Sage."

The fellow grinned. "Reckon you don't. It's Hartsville, about thirty miles due east. Have a good time."

"Thanks." Ken rode through the gate and out on the range. Thirty miles was a pretty tough trip for a man who had so recently lost just about the limit in blood, but he must undertake it. He had to get a telegram off to his father.

WHEN Judith had finished her supper dishes, Gregory Dodge came calling. For the past week he had been dropping in every evening, and the lonely girl welcomed his company. He was a handsome man, born and educated in the East, and excellent company.

They went into the living room and he asked, "How's the calf roundup coming along?"

"We'll be finished in a couple more days. It was awfully good of you, Greg, to let us use your topping-off pasture for the worked-over stuff."

"Don't mention it. There are lots of things I'd like to do for you, Judy, if you'd only let me. Need any help? My crew isn't too busy."

"No, thanks. We'll make out all right."

There was a short silence, then he said, "You know, Judy, I'm not going to be your neighbor very much longer."

She looked at him in dismay. "You're not leaving the 66?"

"I'm afraid I am. It's been sold to a man named Frank Randall of Kansas City. I'm expecting his representative to arrive any day now. The new broom will, of course, sweep clean."

Regret was strong within her. His companionship had meant so much to her. "But, Greg, I hadn't dreamed. . . . What are you planning to do?"

He came over to the sofa and sat down beside her. His smile was a bit wistful. "Go back East, I suppose. I don't want to; I like the West and I like cattle, and I like my neighbor." Her hand was on the sofa and he laid his own over it gently. He looked into her eyes and his voice too was gentle. "What I do depends upon you, Judy. I'm very much in love with you, you know."

Judith felt the warmth steal into her cheeks and looked away, but when she made a little effort to remove her hand his fingers closed about it and she did not try again. She said confusedly, "Why, Greg, I—"

"Yes, I know my proposal is sudden, for it is a proposal, but I've had it in mind a long time. I just didn't want to rush you, Judy, but now time presses. I never thought I'd marry, because I didn't believe the woman I'd want to call my wife existed. But then I met you, and—I knew."

His voice was low and caressing, and Judy felt a little tide of emotion well up within her. The loss of her father had left her terribly alone, and her association with Greg had dispelled some of that loneliness. She was a normal, healthy girl. She wanted to shift the burden of ranch management to broader shoulders; she wanted the leisure to care for her home, to dress as a young woman and not as a cowhand; she wanted the pleasure that a woman finds in seeing to the comfort of an appreciative male. She had had her share of day dreams. But marriage to Gregory Dodge—

She turned to him impulsively. "Oh, Greg, I don't know. I really don't."

He raised her hand and pressed his lips to it. "Of course you don't my dear. I shouldn't rush you, but the time is so short. So hurry, darling, and fall in love with me. Please do."

He released her hand and stood up. "I've got to run along. That representative may be waiting for me even now. But I'll be over tomorrow, and I hope you have good news for me. Good night, my dear."

DODGE rode slowly across the moonlit rangeland towards the 66. He was feeling pleased with himself. He had startled Judy with his abrupt proposal and for a moment had come very near to sweeping her off her feet. But he was too wise to force the issue. Give her time to get used to the idea, to remember his sterling qualities, to realize how lonely it would be without him, and she would consent to marry him.

There was nothing back East for him. Here in the West was the place to carve a fortune. But to remain here and rule the Box F, he must cover up the shortage in cash and cattle. Otherwise, he'd stay in the West, but in a jail.

It was fortunate that he'd run across the representative in Sage that Saturday night. He had ridden in early when Judy had decided not to go, and the fellow had seen the brand on his horse and had asked the way to the 66.

Gregory had introduced himself and had been shown the letter of introduction. To gain time he had told the fellow that he was not going to be at the ranch the following day and asked him to come out to see him on Monday morning. On Sunday afternoon he had seen Biff Parker, and for five hundred dollars had secured the services of one of his outlaws, and now

the rep was no more and the letter was in Dodge's possession.

Greg could wait a week or so then write the Ace people that the owner's representative had not shown up. In time another one would appear, but by then Dodge would have covered up.

Back in the living room of the 66 ranch house, he sent the negro cook after his foreman, Rip Rex. When Rex came in Greg told him, "You can push the Box F stuff through the canyon tomorrow night. Haze some of our cattle into the topping-off pasture so nobody'll notice that the Box F cows are gone. Park them on the other side in the usual place."

"Keno," said Rip. "When do we start drivin' the 66 stuff?"

"When the new rep shows up. We'll tally and turn them into the pasture and then I'll pull out. After that it's up to you and the boys. I'll meet you on the other side and we'll see Benson and get the cash from him. Half for me, half for you and the boys."

"And we get nothin' for drivin' the Box F stuff?"

"Nothing. I'll need every cent to square me up here. But half of the sale price of the 66 stuff will make a tidy nest egg for all of you."

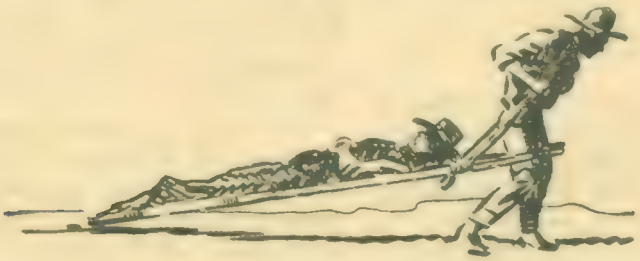
Rip nodded, his eyes glinting. "It'll be the biggest steal in hist'ry. We'll run off everything but Sam's cat."

He went out, treading softly, and Dodge leaned back in his chair and contemplated the ceiling with complacent eyes. He felt very good about the way everything was turning out.

KEN RANDALL returned to the basin at sundown on Tuesday and went into the house as Biff and his four outlaws were about to eat supper. They greeted him sourly, and he guessed that now that the dirty work had been done they would have been quite pleased if he had not returned at all.

They ate in silence, and after the meal had been finished a poker game was started. Ken sat in with them and won from the start. In a very little time he was forty dollars ahead, and he could sense that his villainous pals didn't like that at all. He put on the brakes, betting conservatively and tossing in hands that might have won, and by midnight was just about even. It was then that one of them stiffened and said, "Here they come!"

They all listened then, and Ken heard the distant bawl of cows and the rumbling, shuffling sounds which told of a trail herd on the move.



A long trip and a tough one for both of them

He pushed back his chair and got up. "Deal me out, boys. I'm just about where I started. Can't make money thataway." He looked at Biff. "Any objection to my watching the parade?"

Biff growled, "Go ahead—if you ain't never seen no cows before."

Ken went out and walked down to the trail. He was tense and anxious, thinking that Gregory Dodge was getting rid of 66 cattle. If Dodge was as crooked as Ken thought he was, he would next draw the money out of the bank and head for Mexico.

The van of the herd emerged from the dark canyon. There were two men with the point rider, and they dropped out to

watch the flank and prevent the cattle from straying into the basin. Ken rolled a cigarette and struck a match as one of the flankers was passing, and by the brief flare saw the 66 brand on the man's horse.

He walked to the corral, whistled up his horse and saddled him. He had to know where that drive was headed. He led the animal from the yard and stood with him close to the trail as the cattle passed. There must have been several hundred in the bunch. The flankers dropped in with the drag and the last of the herd was swallowed by the blackness of the canyon. Ken waited a short time, then mounted and followed them.

He passed through the gate at the other end of the canyon right on their heels and waited in the dark passage beyond to give them a lead. When he emerged on the moonlit range the cattle had forded the creek and were headed eastward along the base of the hills. He followed, keeping to the shadows.

Within half an hour he saw the head of the long column swing to the south and disappear in what he shortly discovered to be the bed of a dry gully. He followed this cautiously as it wound deeper into the hills, until the bars of a gate stopped him. Beyond the gate was a little park, its moonlit surface dotted with cattle. Here, Ken supposed, the stolen cattle would be left until disposed of. The 66 riders had already gone. Arrangements had probably been made for the buyer to pick them up.

Ken opened the gate and rode down into the basin. Better make sure that there were actually 66 cattle before starting anything. It was not necessary to use his rope. The moon was bright enough to show the big brands on the hips of the cattle. And sight of that brand brought an oath of amazement. The brand was a Box F!

THAT was Judith Fenton's brand. But the rider he had investigated was riding a 66 horse. Could it be that the 66 crew, believing their jobs would go with the change in ownership, were feathering their nests with Fenton cattle?

He rode slowly back to the gully's mouth, passed through the gate and dismounted to close it. As he turned to remount a voice spoke from the darkness. "Right curious cuss, ain't you?" It was the voice of Biff Parker.

Ken remained standing, his horse between him and Biff, staring over the saddle into the black mouth of the gully. Dimly he could discern the group of mounted men. Biff's four outlaws were with him.

He said, "Yeah, I was curious, Biff. And look what I found! Box F cows driven by 66 riders. Going to let 'em get away with it, Biff?"

"Nope. And we don't aim to let you git away with it, either."

Ken's hand stole to his hip and drew the Colt. He held it ready to fire across the saddle. He said, "I can't get away with anything alone. I was just figuring on riding back to the canyon and putting a little proposition before you. You got places in the hills where we can move this stuff. No use letting the 66 have the gravy when we can dish it out to ourselves."

"You catch on quick," sneered Biff. He turned to his companions and they conversed in low tones for a few seconds. Then he said to Ken, "All right, pilgrim, we're cuttin' you in. Ought to have another man to drive 'em anyhow. One at point, one in the drag, and two on each flank. Let's get 'em goin'."

The six of them rode into the basin and soon had the cattle on their feet and bunched. A long thin column headed out of the basin and back down the gully to the open range. Ken rode on one flank and kept his eyes open.

They did not drive into the canyon, but forded the creek and pushed westward along the hills to another opening which wound upward. But this one was a labyrinth, twisting and turning so many times that Ken, in spite of his efforts to memorize the course, was soon completely lost. The cattle plodded wearily and protestingly along, out of one ravine and into another, over rocky flats and shale beds, threading among boulders as large as houses, keeping the flankers busy riding back and forth to hold them. Dawn was breaking when the

animals descended through a crack in the earth and entered a grassy basin.

The six men gathered in a tired knot at the entrance to the park and Biff said, "We'll leave 'em here until the excitement dies down. Let's cut for the canyon and breakfast. We'll take the short-cut down the cliff. Come along, feller.

Ken would have preferred riding in the rear, but there was no way he could gracefully decline Biff's invitation. He spurred up beside Biff and they headed away from the park. But now it was daylight and Ken could place landmarks in his mind.

The attack which he had half-expected came without warning. The riders were crowded together in a passage between two huge walls of rock. Biff moved ahead of Ken to lead the way, and two of the following outlaws pushed their horses up on either side of Ken until the heads of their mounts were bobbing at his knees. Alert though he was, it was quite simple. The one on his left quietly drew his gun and brought it down on Ken's head, and at the same time the outlaw on Ken's right reached out and snatched the gun from his holster.

Ken sagged forward, then slid sideways, but they were crowded so closely together that there was no space for him to fall. They halted, and the outlaw who had taken his gun circled Ken with his left arm and said to Biff, "Take the hoss." He raised Ken from the saddle as Biff led the animal away, then dropped Ken to the ground.

Biff got down and went through his pockets, his face brightening when he found what remained of the fifty dollars. He remounted and they moved ahead unhurriedly, the following horses gingerly sidestepping to avoid trampling the still, huddled figure on the ground.

GREGORY DODGE rode confidently into the yard of the Box F, tied at the hitching post, went up on the gallery and rapped on the door. Judith said, "Hello, Greg," and let him in. She was smiling, but the smile was a nervous one.

On the way to the living room he casually slipped an arm about her waist. She did not seem to mind. He led the way to the sofa and drew her down beside him. He was smiling tenderly and his eyes were very warm. She asked, "Did the man you were expecting arrive?"

"Not yet, but it won't be long."

She did not resist when he took her hand in his. It was her left hand and he noticed that it was cold. He turned it over and studied the pink palm. "It's a pretty hand," he said. "It'll look swell with a band of gold around the ring finger." She said nothing and he added softly, "I hope."

She spoke then, the words coming as though forced between her lips. She said, "Greg, I can't do it. I can't marry you."

He felt a shock that ran from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. He said sharply, "Judy! You can't mean that!"

She nodded. "But I do. Don't be angry with me, Greg. I just can't. I don't know why. I've thought it over and over and it must be that I just don't love you as a wife should love her husband. You understand, don't you?"

She glanced at him appealingly and was surprised at the look on his face. She read shock, unbelief and injured vanity on the frozen features. His eyes were no longer warm. Just for a moment she saw these emotions, then the muscles became mobile again, the dark eyes turned anxious and appealing.

"But, Judy, you can't mean it! I—love you! I need you!"

How he needed her! He needed the money to her account in the First Bank of Sage; he needed the fat cattle which grazed on her range; he needed her as a guaranty of his future security. And here she was declining his offer of marriage! He said again, "You just can't mean it!" and there was genuine anguish in his voice.

"But I do," she said gently. "I wish it were different, really I do. We've had such fun together, and I hope we still will. Really there's no reason why we shouldn't. We can be good friends and ride together and have our little picnics in the hills, and maybe some day—well, people do change, you know."

He sighed and looked wearily away. It was good acting. He said sadly, "There

will never be a some day for us, Judy. I'll be leaving as soon as I turn things over to the new owner. There's nothing here for me now." He turned suddenly and drew her to him, and his voice was husky with synthetic passion. "Oh, Judy, Judy! Don't send me away! Marry me now—tonight! I'll make you love me. I swear I will!" It was the last desperate appeal.

She submitted to his kiss but there was no response, and finally he released her and got to his feet. He said, "I see it's hopeless, hopeless." He fumbled about for his hat, found it and walked blindly towards the door. She followed him, watching the show, realizing suddenly that it was a show. He stumbled through the door, and his fingers worked with the loose knot in the rein. Without looking at her he got into the saddle, let his shoulders sag to a despairing angle, and rode slowly away.

She said, "Good-by, Greg," and went inside and closed the door. She leaned her back against it and a surge of relief flowed through her. She had made the right decision. "He doesn't love me," she said softly. "He doesn't love anybody but Gregory Dodge."

Dodge, safely out of her sight, straightened in the saddle and swore harshly. To be turned down by a ranch girl who had spent her life wrestling with cows was bitter medicine for a man whom women had always found irresistible. It was doubly bitter at this time. There was nothing left for him but to clean up and get out.

BACK on the 66 he got off his horse and strode into the bunkhouse. He called Rip Rex outside and gave him his orders in a strained, harsh voice.

"Clean up the Box F stuff tonight, and tomorrow start gathering 66 stock. Cull out everything but the best and turn the cream into the topping-off pasture. Have the range combed and be ready to push them through Cowthief Canyon Saturday night."

Rip whistled softly. "That's some order, Greg. What's the matter—the little lady turn you down?"

"What are you talking about?"

"It ain't hard to figger. You were awful anxious to make up the shortage and leave the 66 with a clean slate. Only reason for that is that you wanted to stay here. Only way you could stay was marryin' the Box F."

"You're crazy. I wouldn't marry that little snob if she was the only woman left on earth. You get that 66 stock gathered and push it through on Saturday night. I'll ride through Sage and meet you on the other side and we'll close the deal with Benson on Sunday."

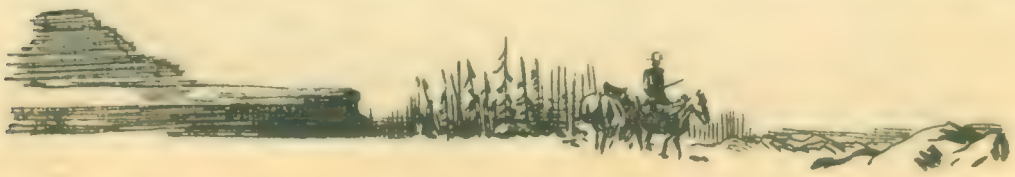
He strode towards the house leaving Rip gazing thoughtfully after him.

"So you'll ride through Sage," Rex muttered. "And you'll draw all the 66 money from the bank. Mexico, here comes Gregory Dodge!"

The next day Judith's crew finished calf roundup, and she rode to the 66 topping-off pasture with her boys to release the Box F cattle that had been held there. They rode in to haze the cattle out on the range and almost immediately one of the men came to her, a worried look on his face.

"Judy, what goes on here? There ain't a Box F cow in sight. All 66."

His statement was quickly verified and Judith, vaguely troubled, rode to the 66 ranch house in search of Dodge. The place was deserted except for Sam, the cook, and he didn't know anything about it. "All I know," he told her, "is dat de crew's done gone out to round up cows. Don' know where Mistah Greg is. Gaddin' aroun' somewhere, I reckon, like always."



Judith finally found Rip and the crew riding circle at the upper end of their range. She told Rip about the absence of Box F cattle and he said, "Now that's right funny. They was in there yeste'day. Must be some fence down. We're roundin' up for a tally and we'll cut out your Box F stuff."

Judith had never heard of one complete herd moving out of good pasture and another moving in of their own volition. She asked where Greg was and Rip said he didn't know, so she rejoined her crew with the strong conviction that all was not well. She said to the boys, "We'll have to comb the range and take a rough tally. Just approximate. And look for cows that you know were in that topping-off pasture. Divide up and take it in sections."

They worked all day at the task and the report that night dismayed her. From the figures she got from them she estimated that around three hundred head of cattle were missing, and that number represented the animals that had been penned in Greg Dodge's pasture.

"There's only one answer to that," she told them grimly. "They've been rustled out of that pasture and 66 cows pushed in so that we wouldn't notice that they were gone. And the only place they could have gone is through Cowthief Canyon."

SITTING dazedly on a rock, Ken Randall slowly smoked a cigarette. The tobacco had no taste, for his head ached and his mouth was dry. He had been sitting there for ten minutes, gathering his strength and his wits after recovering consciousness. His horse and gun were gone and he had no food and no water. It was plain enough that Biff Parker and his outlaw pals had left him here to die.

The thought stirred him and he stood up. He was not ready to die yet. If he could find his way to the park where the cattle had been left he would at least have water. He started walking.

All afternoon he plodded doggedly along, his course winding because of the many obstructions he had to circle, and the sun was low and he was ready to drop with weariness when he sighted a clump of trees on a distant ridge. The sight gave him new energy—where there were trees he might find water. He reached them at last and found them to be stunted pines and junipers. And there was no water. His strength, already sapped by the recent loss of blood, was entirely gone. He sank de-

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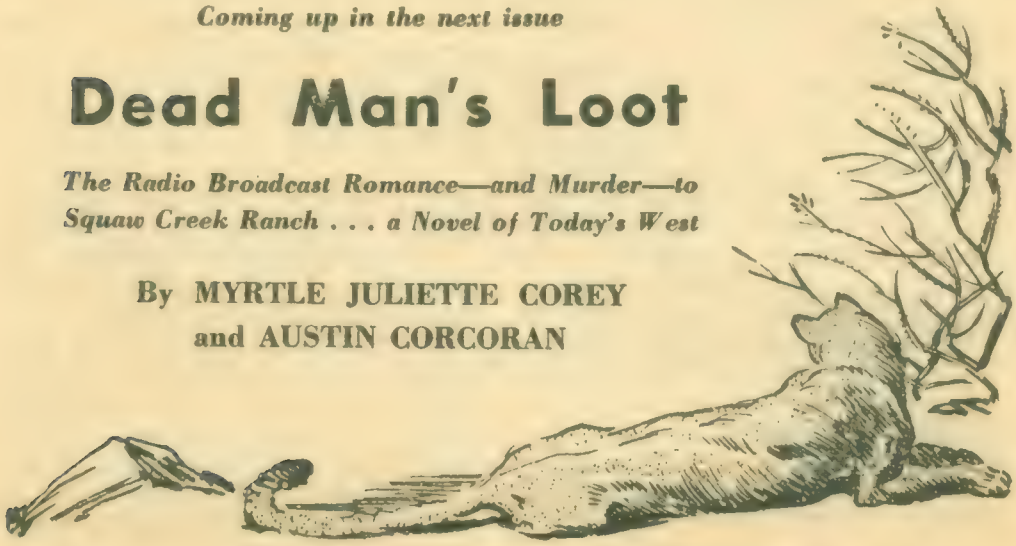
Coming up in the next issue

Dead Man's Loot

The Radio Broadcast Romance—and Murder—to Squaw Creek Ranch . . . a Novel of Today's West

By MYRTLE JULIETTE COREY and AUSTIN CORCORAN



jectedly to a fallen log in hopeless apathy.

Before him lay a long, rocky slope and beyond that a cliff. He found himself staring at something at the bottom of the cliff that looked like a smoothly rounded boulder. The fact that it was not a boulder finally penetrated the cloud which smothered his mind. He studied it carefully and finally concluded that it was the body of a horse. A horse! He came to his feet with a surge of new energy. The presence of even a dead horse in this waste meant some human being had been here recently.

He stumbled down the slope, and as he drew near he saw that the horse was fully rigged. It must have fallen while angling down the face of the cliff and had probably broken its neck. But where was its rider?

Ken's eyes searched the base of the cliff and presently he found him. The man was lying on his back and one leg was grotesquely twisted. Ken slid into a gully and clawed his way up the opposite bank. He rounded a pile of rocks and came to an abrupt halt.

The injured man, aroused by the sounds of Ken's approach, had propped himself on his left elbow and was staring directly at Ken. The hope in his eyes changed as recognition came. Once more they blazed with hatred and resolve. His hand fell to the holster at his right hip and the big Colt came out and up, and Ken, too weary to move, stared at the black half-inch hole in its muzzle.

The sheriff aimed deliberately and Ken heard the click as he drew back the hammer. Ken stared fascinatedly, momentarily paralyzed, unarmed, his strength gone, unable to resist. He tried to cry out something, to gain time in which to explain. The words refused to come out of his parched throat. Instinctively he took a step forward, his hands held out protestingly.

His very weakness saved him. His knees buckled beneath him, and he fell just as the gun roared. He felt the bullet snatch at his hat and whine off the rocks behind him. The strength of desperation came to him. His hand lay on a stone. He clutched it and shied it at the sheriff. There was no force behind it, for lying as he was he could give it little momentum, but the lawman had to duck and throw his gun arm up to protect his face.

Ken started to roll, the rough stones gouging him, his wounded shoulder shrieking with pain at each impact. He heard the sheriff swear as he loosed another shot. The bullet struck a stone beside Ken. He was rolling in the direction toward which Wagner's head was pointed, and the injured sheriff was unable to move his body. His third shot passed over Ken.

Then Ken brought up against a big boulder which halted his progress. Instantly he came to his hands and knees, fighting for survival. Wagner had twisted the upper part of his body and once more the Colt swung around to cover Ken. There was sweat on Wagner's face, and his eyes were bright with the pain the movement had caused.

There were stones all about Ken. He picked one up, reared back to his knees and let it fly. He was throwing for his life now, and there was power behind the missile. It passed over Wagner's head, but once more the man had to duck to escape it. Before he could raise his head, Ken flung another.

He kept throwing them like a boxer throws left jabs to keep his opponent off-balance, and he could hear Wagner cursing at his inability to get another shot at the man he thought had killed his son-in-law. Ken couldn't advance or retreat, His only hope lay in keeping those missiles flying, staving off that last shot which he felt would not miss.

WAGNER, stung to desperation, raised his head and kept it up, ignoring the stones which flew about him. And as he was about to fire, one of them struck him in the forehead.

The hand which held the Colt sagged downward, and when the taut thumb released the hammer the bullet ploughed into the earth feet away from Ken. And then, surrendering to a force greater than his own, Wagner's head drooped, the arm which supported him buckled, and he slumped to the ground.

Ken staggered to his feet and made his uncertain way to where the lawman lay. He picked up the Colt which lay at the sheriff's lax hand and automatically examined it. All the cartridges in the cylinder had been fired, and there were no more in the sheriff's belt. A pile of empties lay about him, and Ken realized that Wagner must have expended his ammunition in firing signal shots.

He did not bother with the bruise his stone had inflicted. Wagner would survive that. He looked at the broken leg. A compound fracture had thrust the broken end of the bone through the flesh. Ken straightened the limb while Wagner remained unconscious, then went to the dead horse and took the filled canteen which was on the saddle. He drank sparingly, then returned to the sheriff and, tearing pieces from his shirt, moistened a bit of cloth with the water and bound it over the protruding bone, using leather strings from the sheriff's saddle.

He searched the man for other weapons, found a big knife and with it in his hand went over to the pines and junipers. He trimmed branches and returned with them and made a rough splint to which he bound the leg. Then he sat on the ground and waited.

Wagner opened his eyes at last, and after a fierce glare at his captor, looked down at the splinted leg. The expression on his face changed to one of wonder. He looked back at Ken and croaked. "You—do that?"

"Yes. I aim to do more. We've got to get you out of here. I figure I can rig up a couple poles like shafts and drag you out on them. You know the way to Sage?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I know. But it's a long drag. Take a couple days or more. I got grub and water." His fierce glance rested on Ken for a full ten seconds, then he said abruptly, "Why in hell did you do this for me?"

"Because," Ken told him, "I didn't hold up any bank or shoot any cashier and never met up with that pinto horse until I was half a dozen miles from Sage."

And then he told Wagner the whole story.

AFTER a fruitless search for her missing cattle, Judith and her crew rode into Sage late Saturday afternoon in search of the marshal. She met him coming out of the town hall and stopped him to report the loss of her cattle and her belief that they had been run through Cowthief Canyon.

"That place has got to be cleaned out," she said. "No matter what the cost, it's got to be done."

Instead of answering, the marshal let out a startled exclamation and pointed to the other end of the street.

A man harnessed to two long poles, was staggering toward them. The poles were lashed with cross braces and covered with pine boughs, and cushioned on the boughs was a man.

The marshal started towards them and Judith stood watching. The man halted before the doctor's office, shook his shoulders free of the harness and lowered the shafts gently to the ground. When he straightened she saw that he was the man who had ridden the pinto pony. She hurried after the marshal. A crowd was gathering and she saw some of them lift the man from the litter and carry him into the office. She could see his face now, and received another shock. The injured man was Sheriff Wagner.

The crowd drifted away, but Judith waited.

The office door opened, and the young man came out to stand on the steps and gaze intently towards the bank. She saw the blue eyes narrow and the lean jaws tighten, and then he came running down the steps and started diagonally across the street. She heard him call, "Dodge! Hold up a minute!"

She looked towards the bank. Gregory Dodge had just come out, and he had heard the call for he had stopped and was staring. Suddenly he ran to the rail, flipped loose the rein and leaped on his horse. He bent over and spurred the animal into a run, and dust spurted as he raced down the street.

The young man halted, glanced about him quickly, then ran across the street to the

hotel hitching rack. She gasped in amazement as he selected a short-coupled bay belonging to the Box F and stepped into the saddle. Before she could do more than utter a startled protest, he was flashing down the street in pursuit of Dodge.

Judith set her teeth and ran to her pony. She leaped on his back and sent him thundering in pursuit. It was a long chase, but Judith, being lighter, gradually gained, and at last he heard the beat of hoofs behind him and turned his head. She saw the startled look which came into his face at recognition of her, and he instinctively checked his horse. Judith drew her .38 and pointed it at him and he halted the bay. She rode up to within six feet of him and demanded, "Where do you think you're going with that horse?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Fenton. I had to get right after Dodge. I've a hunch he's making off with the 66 bank balance."

"I don't believe it, but even if it was true, what business is it of yours?"

"I'm Ken Randall. My father, Frank Randall, bought the 66 and sent me down to manage it. I wanted to tell you about it, but you wouldn't listen."

Judith felt herself wavering. "Turn around and come back to Sage, and we'll thrash this thing out."

His jaws clamped tightly together. "I'm telling you the truth, and I'm not going back to Sage right now. I'm going after Gregory Dodge. If you feel like shooting, go ahead and shoot." He turned and rode away, ignoring the threat of her gun.

Judith didn't shoot. She pushed the .38 into her holster and kicked her pony.

She rode beside him this time. She would see this thing through and find out for herself whether or not he was lying. Dodge was far ahead and gaining steadily. Both their horses were tired and his was fresh. They didn't speak as the sun sank and at last it was dark. They had lost sight of Dodge long before.

THEY halted at the stream which flowed through Cowthief Canyon and he dismounted and spoke for the first time since their last stop. "I wanted to catch him before he got into the canyon, but it's too late now. We might as well get some rest."

"Maybe you'd better tell me all about it."

So they sat on the ground in the moonlight, and he told her the story.

When he had finished she said, "Ken, I'm terribly sorry for thinking what I did about you. And I'm glad you had the chance to explain to Sheriff Wagner, for I was sure he'd shoot you on sight."

"He sure tried hard enough. He just nursed that last shot too long."

"And Greg Dodge! Ken, I can't believe it. And yet. . . . But he's in Cowthief Canyon—how will you ever get him?"

"By going in after him. Have you a pair of wire cutters?"

She said she had and went to her saddle for them. Her father's .44 was there too and she brought it back with the cutters. "You have no gun," she said. "Take this. It was my father's. I've carried it around with me since he died."

They walked to the entrance to the canyon, leading their horses. A hundred yards inside that dark slit was the barrier protecting the trail and the barbed wire fence across the stream. He said, "We mustn't go any closer or the guard'll hear us. You wait here with the horses. When you hear my whistle you'll know the gate is open, and you can fetch my horse. I'll be seeing you, Judy."

She said, "Luck!" and gave him her hand. He pressed it firmly and stole down the bank of the creek. She watched as he entered the water, saw it creep up to his waist; then he was moving slowly and silently along the channel and the darkness of the canyon swallowed him.

Ken waded slowly, the gurgle of the creek drowning what slight sounds he made. The darkness shrouded him and he advanced solely by the sense of touch, placing each foot carefully so as not to slip. He counted his steps and when he judged he was within twenty-five yards of the wire slowed his pace. He kept a hand outstretched before him.

He found the wire at last, wrapped a handkerchief around the barbs and held it with his left hand while he cut it close to the post. He let the severed wire swing downstream, then cut another. When he had space enough he ducked under the remaining strands and continued.

He waded another dozen yards then turned to the shore and quietly climbed to the trail. On cautious feet he started stalking the guard. The man was seated on a rock pinnacle, and presently Ken saw a match flare and had a glimpse of his face as he lighted a cigarette.

Ken stole silently to the foot of the rock, plotting in his mind the location of gate and the contour of the rocks; then he stooped and found a pebble. He estimated carefully and tossed it. It landed near the gate with a slight clatter. The guard said sharply, "Who's there?"

There was no answer. The glowing tip of the cigarete vanished and Ken heard the man descend from his perch. He drew the sixgun and raised it and stood poised. Moonlight did not penetrate into the canyon and he must depend upon his hearing for the proper timing. It was perfect; he brought the gun down at the right moment and the guard slumped to the earth.

KEN BOUND the fellow's wrists with his own scarf and his ankles with his belt. No need to gag him; his shouts would not be heard in the basin. Ken felt in a pocket and found the key and unlocked the gate. His whistle brought Judy with the horses. He said, "It was easier than I thought. Stay at the mouth of the canyon, Judy. People saw us racing out of town and your boys might have followed. If they come, send them in."

"You're not going to tackle this alone!"

"Of course I am. I know the layout and I can take them by surprise. Don't worry about me; just wait."

He got onto his horse and rode into the blackness, leaving her standing there. When at last he reached the basin he dismounted and tied his horse and crossed the open space on foot. The house was lighted and suddenly a terrible uproar broke out in it. There were shots and shouts and the crash and tinkle of glass as a window was broken.

Ken broke into a run. It was a good three hundred yards to the house and by the time he reached it the noise of conflict had subsided, but he could hear harsh voices in altercation. With these sounds to smother the thud of his boots Ken stepped up on the porch and looked through the broken window.

Chairs had been upset and utensils had been knocked from the shelf. The table with a lighted lamp on it was upright and behind it stood Biff Peters. He held a gun in his hand and his long face worked as he talked. Before him on the table was a pile of money, banknotes and gold. On the other side of the table, backed against the wall, were three of Biff's outlaw companions. The fourth was lying on the floor, and he was evidently dead.

Then Ken saw Gregory Dodge. He had slumped down in a corner near the stove. His clothing was mussed up, his hair disheveled. His head had sagged until his chin rested on his chest, and one limp hand held a derringer pistol. He was unconscious or dead.

Biff's words came, clipped and sharp. "Yeah, I'm keepin' it all. It's mine, you scum. Make a move, any of you, and I'll plug you like I plugged Dodge."

"We got a cut comin'!" roared one of the outlaws. "We been doin' your dirty work for months and ain't got nothin' out of it but tobacco money. Damn you, Biff Parker, split it! Split it, I say!"

The three outlaws stood tense and poised, ready to leap, but the steady gun in Biff's hand held them. Biff answered sharply, profanely, and as they argued Ken saw Greg Dodge's head slowly rise and a face

contorted with malignancy come into view. Dodge was looking at Biff. The hand with the derringer rose slowly, so slowly that the movement was not perceived by the arguing outlaws. At the last moment Biff must have caught the flicker of movement, for he turned his head quickly towards the corner. He was too late. The derringer roared and Biff spun around, dropping his gun.

INSTANTLY the outlaws leaped, but not at Biff. They sprang at the table and started scooping up the money. Ken ran to the door and kicked it open, and at the sound they whirled, reaching for guns.

Ken thumbed the hammer of the Colt Judith had given him. There was a futile click. He drew the hammer again and let it fall. Another click! He flung the useless weapon in the outlaw's face and heard his yell of pain as the heavy metal smashed his nose. Ken lashed out with a foot and caught the second outlaw in the stomach. He doubled up, his gun forgotten. And then Ken hurled himself at the third, grasping the wrist of his gun hand.

The man was powerful and Ken had but one arm. He tried to use the injured one and pain stabbed him like a hot knife. They wrestled about the room, Ken trying to keep the gun out of line, the outlaw determined to turn the barrel so that he could fire. It was a losing fight for Ken. There was no strength at all in his left arm and very little in his weary body. The outlaw seized Ken's good wrist with his left hand and twisted with his right and Ken's fingers lost their grip.

Through a red haze he saw triumph blaze in the outlaw's eyes. He gave Ken a violent thrust which sent him reeling against the wall. The outlaw's .44 swept down to cover Ken, and Ken saw the thumb tense on the hammer.

His ears were ringing and he didn't even hear the shot, but his eyes, fixed in horrified fascination on the outlaw's face, saw the man stiffen as though a current of electricity had passed through his body. His eyes bulged and his jaw sagged. Then he collapsed like an empty sack and Ken heard a girl's voice shout, *"Ken!"*

He looked toward the window and saw beyond the broken panes the white face of Judith Fenton. The .38 in her upraised hand was still smoking.

He laughed a bit shakily. "That .44 was a good gun, Judy, a mighty good gun, but it wasn't loaded!"

Remembering the guard at the barrier, he went to the door and scanned the moonlit basin. There was no sign of the guard, but as he watched a group of horsemen came sweeping out of the canyon, and Judith, who had joined him, cried, "They're my boys! *This way, Box F!"*

The outfit rode in with the marshal, who took charge of the final clean-up of Cowthief Canyon. Judy and Ken and the Box F crew were ready to leave when the sounds of moving cattle reached them and they went out to investigate. It turned out to be Rip Rex and the 66 crew attempting the "biggest steal in his'try." They too were gathered in and the cattle returned to the 66 range.

And so at last Ken found himself in the 66 ranch house with Judy at his side, and when he glanced down at her and found her smiling up at him so sweetly, he bent over and kissed the smiling lips.

She didn't mind at all, because when she looked into his eyes she saw something that told her she wasn't going to be a lonely cowgirl any more.

Coming up in the next issue

DARK TRAIL RIDER

Kimberly Learned the Right Direction in Time to Steer a Kid Where He Had Once Wanted to Go

A Novelette

By TOM W. BLACKBURN

Lonesome Ride

By Elmer Kelton

Words came slowly to him, and all he could do was look at her

AMID the settling dust, Deputy Sheriff Andy Hayes holstered his warm sixgun and knelt on his long legs beside the dying man. The young robber's frightened eyes, wide open, stared up at him like those of a cornered rabbit. With one hand over the growing red splotch on his chest, the gasping outlaw turned his head toward the little dust cloud which hid his escaping partner. His lips moved pleadingly, but no sound came. Then suddenly he was dead.

A strange tightness was in Hayes' throat as he searched the robber's pockets for identification. It hurt to kill his first man. Especially because that man was young and handsome, probably just an impatient cowboy wanting to make a stake in one day.

Hayes found a letter inside the puncher's worn vest. Finished but never mailed, it was signed "Tommy Clyde."

The deputy's big hands trembled a little as he read what the cowboy had written to a girl named Julie. He had poured out his love to her and told her how their little ranch would look when he returned with the money for it. He had written that he and a partner he called Duff Daggett were working on a big trade that would give him the money needed for a down payment on a ranch for him and Julie to share.

HE SAW his dream in her eyes blotted out by the truth

As Hayes read the love-filled letter he thought of a girl named Mary, and how he had always wanted to say those words to her. She had disapproved of men who wore guns, even law guns, but Andy hadn't given his up. So finally she had married another man.

Hayes wondered what Julie looked like —what sort of girl she was. Wonderful, he figured, to make this poor cowboy love her so much.

The rapid pounding of galloping hoofs behind him broke up Hayes' thoughts. He quickly slipped the letter into his shirt pocket. Putting the cowboy's dusty hat over the still face, he rose to meet the posse.

In a choking swirl of dust, paunchy Elton McReady reined up and glared belligerently down at the tall Andy Hayes. "Got one of 'em, I see. Did you get the money back?"

Hayes raked a quick glance over the big group of riders. He looked back at McReady and tried to fight down the man's contagious antagonism. "His partner, the killin' one, seems to've had it all. And he's took to the tall brush."

Scowling fiercely, McReady almost bit through his stubby cigar. "You and that worthless sheriff—just alike! You let two strangers come in and rob my bank, and one of them gets away with all the loot!"

Hot fury seething through him, Hayes fought down a savage impulse to reach up and ram that cigar down McReady's fat throat. But he had always fought it down. As a lawman he had always had to.

He pointed to his dead horse, forty yards behind, then breathed contemptuously, angry heat tearing the words from him: "All you care for is your precious money. You don't give a damn that the other robber shot Foy Adams down in cold blood. You don't give a damn if Foy's widow and kid starve now. Well, if you want your money so bad, go get it yourself!"

Hayes turned his back on the blustering McReady and asked a friend to ride back to town for a wagon.

"I reckon this'll finish us both, come election," old sheriff Tol Murphy said with bitterness a couple of hours later. Worriedly he was pacing the floor in the Delaney jail's front office. "Elton McReady'll git me beat if it costs him ever' cent he's got left in that tin bank of his."

Andy shook his head and handed Murphy the letter from the young robber's pocket. As he watched the frowning sheriff read, he thought again of the girl, Julie, and the cowboy who had loved her. No man who wrote a letter like that could really have been bad, he told himself. Weak, maybe, but not bad. He kept wondering how the girl compared with Mary Hanson, how her voice sounded, or if she had loved the young cowboy as much as he had loved her.

Somewhere on the road to town Andy had realized he wanted very much to see the girl. And that had been in the back of his mind as he worked out the plan he presented to the old sheriff.

He would go to Tommy Clyde's home ranch, he explained. There he would watch and listen, and maybe this Duff Daggett might show up, or anyway he might get a lead on him.

"All right," the wrinkled sheriff agreed finally. "But if you don't git that money back, there ain't no use in you comin' home. After election I'll be swampin' out somebody's saloon. And you'll be lucky to git a job herdin' sheep!"

ANDY'S long-legged sorrel trotted smoothly down a sandy slope which gradually fanned out into a broad, open roundup ground before the ranch's big front corral. It had been two weeks since the deputy had left Delaney for a ride which had carried him halfway across West Texas. A long rainy spell had made him hole up more than a week on the way.

So this was the Slash C, Tommy Clyde's home ranch, Andy thought as he looked over the corrals, the three wooden windmills, the frame buildings.

Then he saw her. She sat on the front porch of one of the small houses, this girl whom he knew must be Julie Worth. Riding closer, he felt a tingle of excitement as he made out her slender figure, the soft curves outlined by her simple cotton dress, and the blondish hair which tumbled down over small, straight shoulders. Three tiny

kittens lay beside her on the porch, and she held a fourth in her lap, gently washing its eyes with milk.

"Kinda fudgin' on Nature, aren't you?" Andy greeted her with a grin as he dismounted.

A warm smile glowed as she lifted her friendly face to him. "I guess they aren't due to open their eyes for a few days yet," she admitted, "but I just couldn't wait. I love kittens, don't you?"

Andy grinned. "Sure do."

The girl laughed. "Come on in and I'll show you some more. We have all sizes and shapes."

They went into a warm, fragrant kitchen, and she knelt and petted two little balls of fur that were busily lapping milk from a saucer.

His blood tingling a little, Andy cast about for something to say. But as always, words came slowly with him, and all he could do was look at her. Twice he lifted his hands as if to speak, then stood in silence, hoping she wouldn't see the red color he could feel burning his ears.

"My name's Andy Hayes," he managed finally. "They told me in town I might get a job here. Said you all had . . . had lost a hand."

Her smile died, and a thin mist glistened in her soft, blue eyes. "Yes, some outlaws robbed and killed the owner's son Tommy a couple of weeks ago." She looked down at a tiny kitten that had climbed into her lap and absently stroked its short, furry back. "Maybe if you'd talk to Mr. Clyde—"

She *had* loved him, Andy realized. How much, he couldn't know. Somehow he felt a little disappointed. But he knew he should have expected it.

THE GIRL pointed to a short, heavy man who stood looking over the back fence of an open corral. As Andy walked toward him, leading his horse, he could see that the ranchman was aiming a rifle at something in the edge of the mesquite, two hundred yards away. A coyote.

The rifle crashed. The coyote leaped up, fell limply, and lay kicking his last breaths away.

As Clyde lowered the smoking rifle and turned to face Andy, the deputy could see a bleak, hopeless look in the man's grey eyes, like the look that had been in the eyes of Foy Adams' widow.

"Yes," Clyde told him presently, running a gnarled hand through thick, grey hair, "we could use some help, all right."

"They told me in town about your son, Mr. Clyde," Andy experimented sympathetically. "I'm awful sorry about that."

A hard, hateful glint crept into the wrinkled man's eyes now, burning out the hurt. "Someday I'll find the man who killed my son," he vowed grimly. "I'll shoot just as straight as I did at that coyote. And my conscience will be just as clear!"

Andy felt that tightness in his throat again, and he nervously looked down from Clyde's fiery gaze. Would it make any difference to the ranchman if he knew his son had been killed by a deputy, in the line of duty? Andy was afraid it wouldn't.

He knew he would face the blast of Clyde's wrath when he arrested Daggett and regained the loot. Worse, he would face Julie's eternal hatred. A strong impulse to leave tingled in him. He could quit now, and no one would know the difference. Tol Murphy would lose the sheriff's office without knowing why Andy had abandoned the search. But Andy felt the weight of the badge in his shirt pocket. He knew he couldn't quit.

"Go tell Amos Worth I've hired you," Clyde directed at last. "He's foreman. You can put your stuff in the bunkhouse. You'll be the only puncher there till Duff Daggett gets back."

From Julie's father, Andy learned that Duff Daggett had come home nearly two weeks before with the news of Tommy Clyde's death. Outlaws had caught them and robbed them of their horse-trade money, Daggett had said. When Tommy resisted, the men had killed him. Daggett had finally managed to untie himself, slug a guard, and escape, he told the ranch people. He had gone back again, in a couple of days, to try to find out something about the murderers.

"There couldn't nobody feel any worse about this than I do," tall, stooped Amos Worth said quietly, a faraway look in his bottomless blue eyes. "Tommy always liked to make his own way. Always dreamed of gettin' his own ranch. And I was hopin' he'd be my son-in-law. *He* wanted to be, but Julie never would quite say yes."

Andy felt a little relief. He tried to tell himself he didn't know why. A man couldn't love a girl he had seen only once. But Andy knew he had felt a tenderness toward Julie even *before* he had seen her.

Later, alone in the bunkhouse, Andy noticed that Daggett's clothes and some of his equipment were still there. Sure of himself, the robber would likely come home again, Andy reasoned. Chances were Daggett was holed up in a town somewhere. He would be biding his time until it would seem natural for him to return, and report that he had found no trace of the killers. One day he would quit, take the bank money, and disappear forever. Nobody would think much about it, for drifting cowboys were the rule, rather than the exception.

Excitement began to burn in Andy's veins. If Daggett was coming back, chances were he had cached most of the loot here somewhere, not wanting to risk taking it with him.

Big hands trembling a little, Andy blew out the kerosene lamp. He waited impatiently until his eyes grew accustomed to the moonlight which beamed through the small-sectioned windows. Then he began a methodic search of Daggett's war bag, his clothes, his boots, his bed. Discouraged, he was almost ready to give up when he lifted the nearly-flat mattress from Daggett's cot and felt the knot near the foot of it, on the underside. Blood racing, he found the open seam and reached through it. His tingling hand touched flat bundles of paper. The bank money!

Nervously Andy took out the loot. For a moment he considered sending it back to the Delaney bank. Then, grinning dryly, he decided to let that tight-fisted Elton McReady sweat a little longer.

The day Daggett came for the money, Andy could confront him with it, arrest him, and return with him to Delaney.

But that day Julie Worth, and grim Tom Clyde would know who had killed young Tommy!

EACH time Andy rode in through the big corral with Amos Worth and the silent, brooding Tom Clyde, his nerves were tight with dread—fear that Duff Daggett would be there, would recognize him, and would tip his hand before Andy had a chance to play it.

So Julie's smiling face was always doubly welcome—a warm sign that there was nothing to fear. And it became prettier every day. Happily for him, Andy saw much of Julie. She cooked for the three men on the ranch. Evening, as he rode in, Andy would see her caring for the kittens she kept in the barn, or milking one of the ranch's two dairy cows. A couple of her hungry, much-petted dogie calves took care of the job on the other one.

Always after supper, when there was no other work to be done, Andy followed her into the kitchen and helped her with the dishes. The warm sight of her made him wonder why some men wanted to remain bachelors.

One night, as he looked absently, fondly at her, a wet cup slid out of his hands and fell to the floor with a clatter. Both of them reached down for it, and Andy touched her warm hand. For a moment he held it, staring numbly into her soft blue eyes and thrilling to the feel of her smooth hand in his. He groped vainly for the right words, but they didn't come.

A dim red flushed her cheeks, and her heart-shaped lips parted a little as she tried to speak. Then she was in his arms, and he told her without words what he had been wanting to say for days.

The soapy water had long been cold when they finally finished the dishes.

Later he wished it hadn't happened. Some day soon Duff Daggett would come, and the powderkeg would explode. He could take the loot and return to Delaney, he reasoned. He could explain that he

found the robber's cache, but not the man. No one would know—no one but Andy and his biting conscience.

Still, Foy Adams' killer was free. Andy remembered that long ago he had taken an oath to uphold the law, whatever his own feelings. He had drawn his horse. Now he would ride him to the last jump.

It was three evenings later that Duff Daggett returned to the Slash C. Andy was almost ready to undress for bed when the bunkhouse door swung open and a large man stood framed there in the dim moonlight.

His right hand hidden under the covers as he sat on the edge of the cot, Andy tensely gripped the butt of his .45. The man pitched his gunbelt into a chair, then leaned over and lighted the kerosene lamp. He straightened up and stared at Andy, his unshaven face twisted quizzically.

"Hayes, huh? Seems like I've seen you some place."

A dull dread rose in Andy, and a gripping hatred. He tried to keep his face a blank, but memories kept rushing in—memories of Foy Adams twisted in death on the bank floor, and of Tommy Clyde lying wounded in the sand, his lifeblood trickling out between his cramped fingers.

The outlaw's suspicious eyes were raking Andy like a red-hot branding iron, his black mustaches drooping in a dark frown of their own.

SUDDENLY Daggett thundered, "The deputy! I spotted you before the hold-up!"

As the big outlaw dived at him, Andy jerked at the gun he held under the covers. But it snagged a second on a twisted blanket. Then Daggett's angry bulk was crushing him, and they rolled to the bunkhouse floor, fists swinging.

It was a pounding, slashing fight between the tall deputy and the heavy outlaw as they rolled and thrashed on the rough, wooden floor. A small table tipped over with a thump, and tin-can ashtray jangled to the floor. The thin wall rumbled as the men got to their feet and Andy smashed Daggett back with a heavy fist. Shadows danced and jiggled in the flickering yellow light as the lamp table shook violently.

Daggett's kill-crazy, blood-smeared face swam before Andy's eyes as he swung

"Two whiskies and one Mickey Finn!"

again and again. Daggett was beginning to buckle.

Then the bunkhouse door burst open. Tom Clyde, Amos Worth, and Julie poured in an angry flood.

"It's one of the killers!" the sharp-witted Daggett bawled before Andy could speak. Andy leaped at the gunbelt the outlaw had thrown down as he entered the bunkhouse. As his palm closed over it, he heard Daggett yell again, "He's one of them that killed Tommy!"

Tom Clyde snarled in hatred and started to lunge at Andy. The deputy quickly whipped up the gun and trained it on the group.

"He's lyin'!" he protested hotly. But the damage was done. Tom Clyde darted out the door. Andy knew he was going after a gun. The deputy couldn't take time to explain now, or he would have to shoot Clyde in self-defense.

"Julie," he pleaded, keeping his gun trained on Daggett and stepping sideways to the door, "don't believe what he tells you. I'll be back to explain."

But he saw the tears which trickled down her taut cheeks, and he wondered if she would ever believe him again.

OUTSIDE, Andy trotted to the barn. Quickly he bridled the night horse and swung up. As he spurred out of the pen, bareback, an angry bullet kissed his cheek with fire, and he heard the crash of Clyde's high-powered rifle. If this had happened in the daylight. . . .

The horse's pounding, jarring hoofs rapidly carried him toward the deep shadows of the brush thickets. The rifle crashed again and again, and whining bullets searched through the night. Then horse and rider were swallowed up in the shadows, and the shots stopped coming.

They wouldn't be after him, at least not until morning, Andy figured, as he reined up in the brush and tried to catch his breath. He had taken their night horse. He tied the mount to a mesquite and sat down in the sand to watch the ranch buildings. He couldn't leave that money here, now that Daggett was back. Chances were that sooner or later the big man would find it and get away.

It seemed hours later when the last light on the ranch winked out. Andy sat in the thicket, watching, letting the cool night wind soothe the fiery pain in his cheek. Finally, when he figured it was safe enough, he mounted and skirted the shadows around to the back of the barn. Stepping down, he tied the horse again. He stopped and chinked each of his spur rowels with a twig to keep them from jangling. Then he moved stealthily toward the little bunkhouse porch.

There he paused a long moment, tensely listening for any sound that would show someone was awake. None came. He knelt and carefully removed a loose board from the side of the porch. Using a long stick, he probed under the porch until he found the soft bundle. With his long arm he reached through the opening and brought out the money.

The warm blood racing excitedly through his veins, Andy nervously checked the bundle. Yes, it was all right.

Then he froze. A grim voice above him muttered, "Thanks, John Law. I'd never expected to see that money again."

Almost hopelessly, Andy rose to his feet and looked into the barrel of his own .45, which he had left in the bunkhouse. Duff Daggett stood there in sock feet, grinning mirthlessly down on him. Dread crawled up and down under the skin on Andy's back. Daggett hadn't slept. Likely no one had.

"You've already got a bank robbery and murder against you, Daggett," Andy pointed out in desperation. "Add another killin' to it and they'll track you down like a pair of bloodhounds."

Daggett chuckled. "Old man Clyde hates you. He'll never tell about it. If the law can't find your body they can't prove there's been a murder!"

He raised the gun to fire.

A girl's voice pleaded: "Duff! You're not going to *kill* him!"

DAGGETT lowered the gun a little and glanced at Julie, who came running across the yard. Her slender figure was clad only in a house coat and a long night gown, which swirled about her ankles as she ran.

"If you really thought anything of Tommy Clyde—" Daggett tried to shame her—"you wouldn't care what happened to his killer."

"I'm not sure he *did* kill Tommy," Julie answered, stopping at Andy's side. She glanced at the bundle in his hand. "What's that?"

Some hope flowed through Andy as she spoke and put one little hand on his arm. "It's money Daggett stole from the bank in Delaney." Andy looked regretfully at Julie. If only he could find the right words to tell her. . . .

"Tommy was with him, Julie," he said. "That's how he was killed. You see, I'm a deputy sheriff."

Julie choked, then leaned her head on his shoulder and began to sob.

Daggett snarled: "You shouldn't 've told her so much. I can't afford to leave her here now, with her knowin' that."

His lips suddenly dry, Andy gasped. "You mean you'd kill her too?"

Fire smouldered in Daggett's eyes. "I've already killed two men for that money."

Answering the startled question in Andy's eyes, he continued, as though he were bragging. "Sure, I've killed twice. You thought it was your bullet got Tommy Clyde. But it wasn't. I had all the loot, because Tommy had stayed outside and held the horses. Why should I split with him? I turned around and shot him while we were gettin' away."

He brought up the gun again. "Now they'll think you killed Julie and I killed you."

Andy gripped Julie's shoulder tightly and steeled himself for the smashing bullets which would tear them apart.

A gunshot crashed in the night, and a bullet plowed into the wall by Daggett's bare head.

The rifle crashed again, and splinters showered down. Snatching the bundle of money, Daggett leaped off the porch and sprinted toward the shadows of the barn, moving gingerly in his sock feet.

Andy slipped the gun from his waistband and sent a bullet searching after the outlaw.

There was a fiery wink from the corner of the barn, and lead whistled by Andy's ear. He triggered a quick answer and broke for the shadows.

Behind him he could hear Tom Clyde's booming voice, challenging Daggett to come out in the open. Peering intently through the darkness, he made out a shadowy figure creeping slowly away from the barn, in the direction of the horse. Andy fired. The figure dropped out of sight. But the crash of his gun showed he was still in action.

SECONDS later Daggett's dark figure bobbed up from behind a short mesquite and darted toward the barn's back door. Andy fired at him once. Then the door swung, and Daggett was inside.

Breathing heavily, Andy sat on his heels and studied the barn. Daggett would have his gun trained on the door, to blast down anyone who came through it. On this side of the barn was an opening like a window, but with a sort of swinging wooden door instead of glass.

Quickly Andy sprinted to the barn and crouched beneath the window. He listened carefully but heard no sound from within. Tensing himself, he jumped up, hurtled through the window, and rolled to one side as he hit the floor.

Two startled bullets thudded into the floor where he had landed. He lay tensely, trying to adjust his eyes to the darkness of the barn. Cold dread spread through him as he counted back over the shots, he had fired. Four. By Western custom, one chamber had been empty for safety. There was only one bullet left!

His searching left hand closed around some sort of a pole. Lifting it carefully and examining it with his hands, Andy found that the instrument was a hoe.

Only a few feet to his left was the wooden box in which Julie's kittens lay. A desperate idea flashed in Andy's mind. Holding the hoe in his left hand and cradling the end of it under his armpit, he carefully shoved the hoe blade toward the unseen box

With a loud thump the box tumbled over. Excited, the mother cat scurried across the floor. The little barn rocked with thunder as Daggett sent two bullets thudding into the wall. Praying a little, Andy aimed at the flashes and fired.

For a few seconds there was only silence after the booming of the guns. Andy was sure he had missed, and a sick feeling crawled inside him. Then he heard a long sigh, the soft thud of a body slumping to the floor, and the clatter of a fallen gun.

For a long moment he waited, fearing a trick. From outside he heard Julie's anguished voice, pleading for him to answer. Then the barn's big front door burst open and dim moonlight flowed in. He saw Daggett lying motionless on the floor. The outlaw would never move again.

Now Andy had a trip ahead of him—a trip back to Delaney with Daggett's bank loot. But the ride wouldn't be lonesome this time, not if he could find the right words to say to Julie. And somehow he didn't feel tongue-tied any more.

Malone watched her as she fought to hold her temper

The Important Thing

By Clark Gray

MALONE stood with his back to the chuffing, spewing engine and watched the girl he had met on the train as she crossed the platform. A nice girl, he thought. He might look Mary Shaughnessy up after he got settled.

Between the hem of her divided skirt and the mule-ear straps of her Coffeyville boots, Malone could see a section of stockinged leg. He was eyeing it appreciatively when a hand touched him on the shoulder.

Pete Onolfo said, "Malone, when a crusty old dog like you starts watching a girl's leg, it's time he went to work."

Malone turned, grinned, and gripped Onolfo's outstretched hand. Pete Onolfo had been Malone's deputy, five years back. Onolfo was a sober, loyal youngster, and Malone had a real affection for him.

"Still worrying about me, Pete? Maybe I'm not as crusty as you think. You got my letter?"

"I got it," Pete Onolfo said, "and I don't like it, Malone. You're quitting the game just when we need you most. . . . But I found a building for you anyway."

Malone could see the corner of Onolfo's United States Deputy Marshal's badge peeping out from under his vest, and he remembered then to congratulate Onolfo on his new job.

Onolfo sighed. "The whole town is still jammed to the ears with Eighty-Niners," he said. "Lots of people lived in tents all last winter. Law enforcement among this mob is hell, pure, unadulterated hell. What's your idea of going into the feed business anyhow?"

Malone grinned and picked his tattered carpetbag off the station platform. "Show me the building, Pete. Then I'll tell you about it."

"All right. But you ain't quitting without an argument from me. We need good men too bad, Malone. . . ."

The shack proved to be a two-room affair, sided with cottonwood boards and battened with bark slabs. It was crude, Malone thought, but it would do. He could live in one room, store his feed in the other. And it stood at the edge of town. He dumped his carpetbag on the pole-and-cord cot, cuffed back his hat, and began to roll a cigarette.

"I need about a dozen old cows now, Pete. Crowbait stuff—the poorer the better. And if they have young calves, better yet."

Pete Onolfo stared suspiciously. "With winter comin' on? Malone, I reckon you still got *some* sense. You got a way to keep from havin' a die-up?"

Malone nodded, grinning. He could talk about it to Pete, he knew. Pete was his friend. For three years the two of them had been all the law there was in some of western Kansas' wildest trail towns—towns with the hair on. Malone began to explain, and as he talked, the old excitement of it sparked again within him.

He planned, Malone said enthusiastically, to sell a new kind of winter feed. Feed that would be cheap enough and nutritious

Where does a man's duty to the law leave off and his obligation to himself begin?

When Malone saw Mary he thought he knew

enough so that every cowman could feed two or three pounds per day per cow, could not only keep his animals alive and healthy, but could reduce weight losses to practically nothing. He had discovered it, Malone said, on a recent trip through the Nations, hunting a bank robber. He'd seen this new feed being fed at a ranch on Honey Creek. The feed, Malone said, was cottonseed.

AT EVERY gin in the south, Malone said, they were burning huge piles of cottonseed. Just to get rid of it. Not knowing that it contained a highly digestible protein. Protein, the thing cows starved for in winter. Here was a big chance for the right man. Malone grinned and boasted a little now, knowing Pete Onolfo would understand. That's why he had come to Oklahoma, he said—to be close to a supply of cottonseed. He was going to get in at the start. Make his little pile while the making was good. It was a chance that might never come again.

Pete Onolfo listened, the way he had always listened to Malone. But now, for the first time, Onolfo had an argument.

"Malone," Onolfo said. "You're a smarter man than me—any day. You taught me all I know about law enforcement. But I think you're making a mistake. You're a lawman, not a damned merchant."

Malone nodded soberly. That was a thing he had already fought out with himself. He was thirty-five. He'd spent half his life protecting other men, watching other men make their own way while he lived on sixty or ninety or a hundred a month. Now Malone wanted his own life. He wanted a ranch big enough to support a man's family in a decent style. But that kind of an outfit cost money. So Malone was out to get the money.

Pete Onolfo broke into this, his young face earnest. "Malone, every cut-throat and rustler and city thug that's wanted in his home country has come to Oklahoma. It isn't safe for a man to carry ten dollars across the prairie. You've got a duty, Malone."

"No," Malone was determined. "I've done my duty, Pete. Near twenty years of it. A man can be generous on the little things. But on the big things, the important things, a man has a right to be selfish. It's important to me to get a ranch."

Pete Onolfo twisted his mustaches with slim fingers, staring at nothing. Finally he grunted, "All right. You know I'll help you, Malone. I'm busy as hell, but I'll try to round up those cows. What you aim to do?"

"I'm going south," Malone said. "I'm going to sink my last penny in cottonseed, Pete. I'm going to have it shipped up here through the winter, as I need it. And when I come back, I'm going to try to do a job of selling on the cowmen here. I've got to convince them the stuff is good. . . ."

Malone knew that the success of his plan hinged on that—convincing the cowmen. He knew, too, that cowmen did not take kindly to something new. That was why he wanted old thin cows—crowbait. He wanted to show them. By mid-October, when the first frost rimed the tents and tarpaper roofs of Guthrie, he was back in town and ready for business.

HE FENCED his old cows in a ten-acre pasture with a small woodlot adjoining his shack. Twelve cows, with eight young calves. The calves meant that their mothers needed more feed for milk production. Better feed. If they didn't get it, their milk flow would stop and the calves would die. Or the mothers, themselves would die. It was a good test for his cottonseed, and he was satisfied with it.

He rode to the Lazy S and invited Mary Shaughnessy to attend the bi-weekly square dance. Mary accepted. Two night later he rode out again, in a hired buckboard, and brought her into town.

She wore a green dress that might have been just an ordinary dress. But Malone was thinking about getting married—that dress did things to him. He had not been sure of Mary Shaughnessy when he saw her in divided skirts and Coffeyville boots. But riding back with her after the dance, under the frosty skies, Malone was sure.

He talked. He told her why he was quitting as a lawman, why he wanted to settle down. And he let her guess that he didn't want to settle down alone.

Mary Shaughnessy listened to all this with wide, soft eyes. With a kind of eagerness on her face, Malone thought. In the starlight, her lips, parted a little, sent a tinkling shiver down Malone's spine.

At the barbed wire ranch gate, he took his courage in his hands and kissed her.

She smiled at him when he lifted his head. She touched his cheek. Malone felt a great, lilting joy lift through him. He kissed her again, and then, boyish, he swung back his head and let a Comanche warhoop go skidding down across the frost-whitened prairie.

After that, it became a steady thing. Every other Saturday Malone would hire a buckboard to take Mary Shaughnessy to the square dances. On Sundays, he took dinner at her father's house, and it was there that he made his first sale.

Tom Shaughnessy had heard of his crowbait cows. Shaughnessy asked Malone about them, and next day he came to town in a wagon, looked, and liked what he saw.

The cows were beginning the winter well. Malone fed them four pounds of cottonseed a day, and all the hay they would eat. He kept salt before them constantly, and one day in November, during a stiff early freeze, he noted that the animals were drinking less water than usual. This worried him, until he decided it was simply because the water was too cold. The cows would drink barely enough for body needs, but no more. Thereafter, Malone carried fresh wellwater to them twice a day.

Pete Onolfo was interested, too. But as the first wet snows of December began to filter down, Malone suspected that Onolfo wanted him to fail. Onolfo said, "The robberies are getting worse, Malone. Especially right around town, here. Seems like there's one man doing most of it. In the last month, he's committed six armed robberies, stolen a total of fourteen hundred dollars. The marshal says tell you he'll write you out a deputy's commission—any time."

Malone shook his head. "I'm a merchant now, Pete. You wouldn't ask any other merchant to quit his business, would you?"

"This one man," Onolfo said, "is clever as the devil. If you could help us catch him. . . . How's your money holding out?"

"Not so good," Malone admitted. "I'm breaking even. My profits from sales to Shaughnessy just about meet expenses. But it ain't cheap to live in Guthrie these days, Pete."

"If you run out," Pete Onolfo said, "remember that job is always open."

ONOLFO hadn't said *when* you run out. He'd said *if*. But Malone knew what Onolfo was hoping, and grimly he determined not to be drawn back into a job without a future. He took a walk around the slushy streets of Guthrie, that afternoon, watching the wet snowflakes melt to nothingness against the canvas tents, the tarpaper roofs. The aroma of burning wood filled the air; woodsmoke from chimneys and stovepipes curled over the town. Malone stepped into a hardware store and bought an axe and a file.

Wood sold for two dollars a rick, cut to stove length. Malone found he could cut and haul two ricks a day from the woodlot in his pasture, besides caring for his cows and tending his feed business. For the rest of December, Malone earned four dollars a day. He lived off that money and saved a little, enough to buy a gold-plated brooch for Mary Shaughnessy. On Christmas day, he wrapped the brooch carefully in colored paper, tied it with a piece of ribbon, and rode to dinner at the Lazy S.

Mary Shaughnessy wore her green dress. It was the color of the Christmas tree. After dinner, they sat around the glittering candle-lit tree. Malone, and Mary, and Tom Shaughnessy, exchanging presents and drinking eggnog. Mary gave him a wallet, engraved with his name and a tiny picture of a crowbait cow, eating from a trough. Malone grinned at that, and thanked her with his eyes. Presently, when Tom left to carry his presents to the hands in the bunkhouse, Malone moved over beside her on the couch, put his arms around

her, and thanked her again. Then he said,

"Mary, Christmas is a time to speak of what is in a man's heart. I guess you know, but I want to tell you. I—"

"Hush, Malone." Mary put her finger across his lips, stopping his speech. She moved away from him, and her face was suddenly drawn with thought. "Don't say it, Malone. Don't say what you might be sorry for."

"I love you, Mary," Malone said simply. "I could never be sorry for that."

"You could," Mary said. She swung her head away from him, so that he could not see her eyes. But Malone fancied he saw pain in her face. "You could be sorry. I—let's not talk about it. Please."

Malone did not understand. He felt a sinking in his stomach, a desperate fear of impending loss.

STUBBORNLY he continued, "I have to talk about it, Mary. I want to marry you. What could be wrong about that? I have no money now. But next year, maybe—"

"Please, Malone. Please don't. I am not —not sure that I could care for you."

Malone was one who could take his tough luck with the good. He had never done anything the easy way. Nevertheless, this hurt him, deep inside. He rolled a cigarette, frowning, his fingers shaking a little.

"All right, Mary," he said quietly. "I can wait. I did not know I was—hard for a girl to love."

Mary twisted on the couch, facing him, head flung up. Her eyes glistened wetly. "You are not hard to love, Malone. Don't think that. It's only—there's talk around town that Pete Onolfo needs you to catch this trail robber. And that you won't do it because you're scared."

"Who thinks I'm yellow?" Malone said bitterly. "Not Pete. Pete knows better. I have never been called yellow by any man."

Mary said anxiously, "Then why not prove it, Malone? Why not help him? You have a reputation as the best tracker, the best range detective, in Oklahoma. You have a duty to the territory."

"I have a duty to myself, too," Malone replied angrily. "This thing would never end, once it started. If I catch this robber, there will be others. They will never give me any peace." He hesitated, then used again the words he had said to Pete Onolfo. "A man has a right to be selfiish on the important things, Mary."

"A man," Mary said, "has a duty to other people. If he is not afraid to do it."

"Mary, I won't let a snip of an Irish girl tell me what to do. Not about an important thing like this. I'm sorry. I love you. But my business is my own."

It was the wrong way to say it, he thought instantly. It was too blunt. Mary Shaughnessy's eyes flashed, and her tiny fists clenched, and Malone watched her fight valiantly to hold her temper. Finally she lost it, as he had known she would.

"Malone," she said quietly. "Get going, man. Ride out of here, before I bounce the Christmas tree off that thick bone you call a skull. And take your trinket with you."

She unfastened the brooch and flung it at him. Malone caught it with a quick, instinctive movement of his hand. Then Mary ran out of the room, her green skirts swishing.

Malone put on his hat and left the house. He rode back to Guthrie alone, through spitting snow that fell from bleak dismal skies, stinging his face. Through an icy wind that cut like a whetted knife and brought tears to the corners of his eyes. . . .

THE SNOW lasted through January. Malone found a ready market for his wood. He learned with practice to cut two and a half ricks a day, which made his earnings total five dollars. Besides that, with the snows covering last summer's dry grass, more owners of starving cattle came in to enquire about his cottonseed. They liked what they saw, and bought. For the first time now, Malone was making money.

Tom Shaughnessy rode in the last of January for a load of feed—alone. Tom's cheerful face was sober; there was something secretive, embarrassed about it. Malone suspected Mary was the cause of this. Finally he asked about her health.

"I'm glad you asked, Malone. Might as well talk frank about it, hadn't we? Well, she pined around for a week, hopin' you'd come back, I reckon. But you never, and she started makin' the dances with two or three local cowboys. Fellers she knew—nothing serious with any of 'em, I judge. But she seems to have plumb put you out of her mind, Malone. That's the way she wants it, I guess, so naturally that's the way I want it, too. Too bad. I'd have liked you for a partner on the Lazy S."

That was all. Shaughnessy hadn't anything else to say. Nor had Malone. When Shaughnessy tooled the wagon down-street, with a friendly backward wave, Malone picked up his axe and crossed the fence to his woodlot. He had already found that working could dull his misery. By night, he was so exhausted he fell asleep in his chair before the stove. He had cut nearly three ricks of wood that day.

February brought thaws. Guthrie's streets became a sea of mud. The demand for wood fell off a little, but Malone was spending more time with his feed business now. Nearly every cattleman in the area had heard of his cottonseeds. Most were regular customers. And Malone was making more money than he had ever earned in his life.

He was stacking a new shipment of sacked-up feed in his little warehouse, one day in late February when Pete Onolfo appeared in the open door. Malone had not seen Onolfo for a month. The deputy's face was drawn and haggard under his mustache. Onolfo said,

"You've got to help me now, Malone. Mary Shaughnessy was robbed."

SOMETHING happened to Malone's face. He could feel it going to pieces, feel his self control shatter in a desperate overwhelming fear for Mary. He crossed the floor and clutched Pete Onolfo by the vest.

"Mary! Mary, you say? She wasn't—"

"She wasn't hurt, Malone."

Malone nodded. He released Onolfo's vest, feeling the weakness of a vast relief flood him. He sat down on a sack of cottonseeds and he fumbled for his makings.

"She sold a bunch of winter vealers that she owned, personal," Onolfo was saying, "to a travelin' commission man. She was ridin' to town with the money, three hundred-some dollars, when this hombre hit her. The same man, Malone, that we been after all winter. If you'd helped me earlier . . . . Damn it, man we need you! This is over my head, and I admit it."

Malone shaped his cigarette and lit it. Nothing was changed, he told himself. He would gain nothing by helping Onolfo. Mary would think it a gesture of bravado.

But Malone did not like the idea of Mary being held up at gunpoint. When the outlaws in the territory got so bold as to molest women . . . .

Malone made his decision, then, not knowing what was back of it, only knowing what he had to do. He said, "I sold my gun, Pete. Loan me one, will you? A Colt, if you've got it. And get a couple horses and enough grub for three, four days. I'll hire a man to tend shop, and just this once, I'll help you catch your man."

Away from town, where the native prarie grasses had not been trodden out of existence, the ground was soft, but not muddy, forming a turf on which a horse could make fair speed. Malone pushed the little mare that Onolfo had furnished him. Behind, Onolfo, on a piebald gelding, had trouble keeping up, but Malone didn't slow his pace. There'd be time enough to rest the horses, he knew, when the rough tracking began. At the barbed wire gate of the Lazy S holdings, he pulled to a halt.

"Where to from here?" he asked.

Pete Onolfo halted beside him and hesitated twisting his mustache. Finally Onolfo grunted, "Malone, I got one more thing to tell you. Mary knew I'd ask for your help. She didn't want it. She told me she'd sooner lose ten times the money than to ask you for anything. I done it anyhow, of course, but I don't reckon we better let her know till you catch the thief. That girl's got too much Irish in her. She was robbed on Lazy S land, but I tracked the hombre as far as this gate. That's his tracks, headin' west."

Onolfo pointed to a row of faint hoofprints that angled from the gate across the prairie.

MALONE said grimly, "All right, Pete. I never figured Mary would like it. We won't worry about her no more, huh? Come on, son. We got lawman's work to do."

The tracks were easy enough to follow. Malone walked his mare slowly at first, identifying them. This was a familiar business to him. For fifteen years he had done nothing else. He felt the old habits reassert themselves. The constant caution, scanning the horizon, watching the lay of the land for possible ambush. The way of carrying his gun loose in holster, his arm never far from it. The picturing, from the tracks, of what kind of man the fugitive was, how he rode, how much he weighed. At a place where the hunted man had crossed a rocky creek bed, Malone halted and pointed a finger at one clear hoof track in the top of the bank.

"That critter's shoes don't fit him, Pete. See there? You can see the print of the hoof above the shoe. The shoes were too small, and whoever put them on didn't rasp the hoof down to fit. What you make of that?"

Pete Onolfo frowned, then shrugged. "An Easterner, maybe? Somebody that don't give a damn what he does to his horse. A town man?"

"Looks likely. Come on."

It was late afternoon before they reached the rock canyon. A half-mile long, Malone judged, and nearly as wide, it consisted of a jumble of bare rock, broken by an occasional blackjack that had managed to find a crevice big enough to insert scrawny roots a few feet down.

Malone said, "Does he always come here, Pete?"

"Every time. The tracks just fade out here, Malone. I've rode around this canyon till I was dizzy, but I never found a sign of that horse comin' out. And yet, there ain't no place in here a man could hide a horse. That's what's been stumpin' me all winter. That's why I needed you."

Malone grunted and lit a cigarette. He canted his leg across the saddlehorn and frowned at the canyon.

"Any other tracks comin' in and out?"

"Yeah. Cowman by the name of Eben Jones owns this place—part of his original homestead. He runs cattle all around here. But his horse's tracks ain't no ways like this one."

Malone said, "Uh-huh," and squinted thoughtfully at the smoke from his cigarette. An idea came to him, but he rejected it as too fantastic. Then suddenly he saw that it was not fantastic.

"Pete, I think I know what we're looking for. Get off that horse, son, and cook some grub. I got to do some fancy trailin'."

IT TOOK all of the afternoon and part of the next morning. Most of the time, Malone was on hands and knees, scouring the rocks with Indianlike scrutiny, moving inches at a time. He found a scratch on the rocks, here and there, barely distinguishable traces of the scraping of a horseshoe calk. Once he found a horsehair lodged between two boulders. He found droppings, and twice a faintly marked shoeprint where sand had dusted a level bit of stone.

It was tedious work, the kind of work that called for skill and experience, a knowledge of horses and men. Malone understood now why Pete Onolfo had been unable to make progress. In the middle of the morning he found what he was looking for.

He held it in his palm and said, "Here it is, Pete. This will convict your thief."

It was a tiny piece of metal, scarcely bigger than half a pin, glinting in Malone's hand. Pete Onolfo stared uncomprehendingly, then grunted, and a sudden excitement flared in Onolfo's eyes.

"A piece of horseshoe nail. Well I'll be hornswoggled."

"Uh-huh. Jones is your man. He carried blacksmith tools with him when he went out on these little jaunts. On the way back, he'd change shoes here in this canyon. Likely he had some other place to change when he was going *to* a robbery.

It ain't a hell of a job, with a horse that's trained to stand. And he wouldn't need to carry much, just his hammer, nails, farrier's pincers, maybe his leather apron, and the spare shoes. Naturally you couldn't find where your robber's horse came out of this place. He was wearin' different shoes."

Pete Onolfo swore with feeling. "Malone, I got to hand it to you. I'd never have figured this. Thanks, and—and—"

"It ain't over yet," Malone said curtly. "We got an arrest to make. Pack up, Pete, and let's get it finished."

EBEN JONES proved to be a little, bespectacled cowman. One of the class of criminals who used their brain first, and violence only as a last resort—if ever. Jones made no resistance when Pete Onolfo arrested him.

But Malone wasn't worried. While Jones was saddling under Onolfo's gun, Malone poked around the barn. He found the blacksmith tools and—rolled in the leather apron—the shoes that the robber's horse had worn to the rock canyon. These shoes, together with the horseshoe nail, would convict Jones, and Malone had no doubt that, once convicted, Jones would reveal the hiding place of his stolen loot.

In town, Jones called quietly for a lawyer as soon as he was jailed. And in the marshal's office, Malone lit a cigarette, cuffed back his hat, and said grimly to Pete Onolfo, "All right, Pete. You've got your man and enough evidence to convict him. And Mary will get her money. Don't talk to me no more about duty. I'm going back to my feed business."

"Wait a minute, Malone." Onolfo put a hand on Malone's shoulder, and there was some trace, of embarrassment in Onolfo's sheepish grin. "I reckon I got to apologize. Mary—Mary wasn't robbed, really."

Malone stared. He took off his hat and slung it on the marshal's desk. "You framed me?" Anger hardened in him, the baffled resentment of a man who has been tricked. "You rigged this?"

"I had to get your help someway, Malone. I *had* to. Them tracks you followed was from where Jones robbed a drummer yesterday. Mary suggested it, Malone. She—" Pete Onolfo bit his lip, as if he'd said too much.

Malone, glaring, gripped Onolfo's arm, suddenly. A hard bright lump of hope rose in him. "Mary suggested it? Why?"

"She—I don't know, Malone. She wanted to find out something about you—said she had to know. Hell, Malone, don't ask me to explain a woman's reasons."

Malone said, "All right, Pete." Hope was a shining thing inside him now, a brilliant promise of what might be. What would be, if he would forget his pride for just a little while. Malone decided suddenly what he was going to do.

Malone said, "All right, Pete. I won't ask you to explain. I'll ask Mary."

MINERTOWN MISS

Frank Sutherland Didn't Know What He Wanted Until Ellen Made Up His Mind for Him—a Short Story

By RAY TOWNSEND

CONNIVING ELI

Though Slim Was Woman Scared, Eli Thought He Was Too Fine a Fellow to Be Wifeless—a Short Story

By WAYNE D. OVERHOLSER

The Oatman Family

By Maymie R. Krythe

When the girls couldn't keep up, the Apaches beat them

"OLIVIA OATMAN'S free—after five years with the Indians on the Colorado!"

The news spread rapidly in the spring of 1856 through the little settlement of El Monte, California, to the nearby pueblo of Los Angeles, and to the outlying *ranchos* of southern California. People flocked to El Monte to see her, everyone happy that Olivia had been reunited with her brother, Lorenzo. He was the only other surviving member of their original family of nine.

Royse Oatman and his family were members of the Brewsterites, a Mormon sect. They had first lived in Pennsylvania, then in a cabin on a small tract of land at Fulton, Illinois. Because of Mr. Oatman's failing health, the family decided to go to California. They sold their property for $1500 and bought an outfit and provisions. In August, 1850, they joined a party of about 90 people, and all started from a point near Independence, Missouri. They traveled along the old Santa Fé Trail; but because of some disagreement, Mr. Oatman and some friends, with a train of eight wagons and 20 people, separated from the rest.

After innumerable disasters (two fine horses were stolen from them by Indians) the company finally covered 90 miles of desert in southern Arizona and reached the Pima Indian villages in February, 1851. They had hoped to buy food here, but the Indians had hardly enough for themselves. Though the cows and oxen of the emigrants were so exhausted they looked as if they could go no farther, the Oatmans, Wilders,

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A white child was valued booty to the Indians. Olivia Oatman had the bad luck to be such booty, but the good luck to live to remember it

and Kellys were yet determined to push on.

But, at the Pima villages, they heard of recent and barbarous attacks by the Apaches on settlers along the road to Fort Yuma, on the Colorado River. After talking over the matter, the Wilders and Kellys thought it would be wiser to wait until things had quieted down. Royse Oatman, though, believed he and his family would be equally badly off, whether they went on or stayed, and thought it best to go on.

Just before the family started, a Dr. Lecourt arrived from Fort Yuma and reported he had seen no Indians on the way. Somewhat encouraged by this news, Royse Oatman, his wife, and seven children left on March 11, 1851, on their last and fatal journey. For seven days their jaded animals dragged slowly along, with barely enough strength to pull the covered wagon.

Soon Dr. Lecourt overtook them on his way back to the fort, about 90 miles off. He realized the serious condition the Oatmans were in, and promised to hurry on and send help to them from the fort. But he and his Indian guide had traveled only one day's journey farther when they were attacked by other Indians, who stole their horses. Dr. Lecourt left a card with a message for the Oatmans at his camp, and he and his companion started on foot for the fort. It was not known whether Mr. Oatman missed seeing the card, or whether he did see it and dreaded to tell his family of the doctor's warning.

ON THE night of March 18th the Oatmans spent a sleepless night on a little island in the Gila River, about 80 miles from their destination. A hard rainstorm came up, their blankets, food, and clothing were damaged, their animals badly frightened. Next day they traveled a short distance over a rough mesa, where the tired beasts acted as if they were ready to lie down and die. By unloading everything from the wagon, the family finally got it and its contents up a slope. Beyond them lay a vast desert, and to the right and behind them a wilderness of mountains. While Mr. Oatman was wearily working away, he seemed very despondent and kept watching the road. Mrs. Oatman did her best to look after the children and to encourage them and her husband.

At sunset the family was terrified when several Apaches came up to them and demanded a pipe and tobacco. After supposedly smoking a peace pipe with the father, they asked him for food. He talked to them in Spanish, telling them that although his

An Apache

family was nearly starving, he would give them a little bread. After they had eaten it, the fierce Apaches, without a moment's warning, jumped into the air, and with blood-curdling cries raised their clubs and dashed them against the heads of the doomed family.

Lorenzo, a boy of 14, was knocked down and lay unconscious in the dust. His father, bleeding from his wounds, tried to struggle with the Indians, but he soon fell lifeless to the ground. Mrs. Oatman, holding her youngest child, begged for mercy, but the ferocious men killed her, too. In a few minutes the entire family, with the exception of Lorenzo, Olivia, and Mary Ann, was either dead or dying.

When Lorenzo came to, he saw that everyone had been murdered except the two girls. He watched the Apaches plunder the wagon and scatter the feather bed and cook some of the stolen food. After rifling his

pockets, they picked Lorenzo up and threw him over a 20-foot cliff. It was a miracle that he survived. Finally the Apaches left, yelling and driving the two sisters before them down the hill.

As soon as he could, Lorenzo climbed slowly back up the slope and looked at the mangled bodies of his family. He wondered whether a worse fate was in store for Olivia, 13, and Mary Ann, 7. Faint and sick, the young boy crawled along the road, where that night he was attacked by wolves and coyotes.

On the second day of his journey under the hot sun, Lorenzo met some Pima Indians (enemies of the Apaches), who tried to shoot him with their bows and arrows. But when he told them in Spanish what had happened, they gave him some food and drink. Soon afterwards two covered wagons came by. Lorenzo was amazed when he saw one of the drivers was Mr. Wilder, who said, "My God, Lorenzo, what's happened?"

After hearing the tragic story, the Kellys and Wilders returned to bury the bodies of the Oatmans. They took Lorenzo with them to Fort Yuma, where he stayed for three months and was nursed back to health by Dr. Hewitt. Lorenzo begged the commanding officer to send some men to find his sisters, but the officer refused. Finally the disconsolate boy was taken to California.

WHEN the Indians started off with the Oatman girls, they took away their shoes and part of their clothing. The Indians traveled with the swiftness of horses, in a northerly direction, for they feared pursuit by the whites. The girls' feet were lacerated by the rough road, and when they couldn't keep up, the Apaches beat them and threatened to kill them. After many hours' travel, the children were allowed a short rest. They were offered a little food, but were too weary and heartsick to eat.

On the way they met more Indians, one of whom shot at Olivia and just missed killing her. His brother had been killed by an American, and he had sworn revenge. After covering about 200 miles in three days, the Apaches and their two captives approached camp, which consisted of some low huts. The girls were greeted with wild shouts and jeers. That night, while the savages danced around them, the girls prayed to die.

Olivia and Mary Ann spent a year here —a life that was almost unbearable. The few clothes left them were torn and soon dropped off. Then Olivia matted some bark together and tied the rough garments around herself and Mary Ann. Although there was no snow that winter, they suffered from the cold weather. They were treated brutally and beaten when they couldn't understand what the Indians wanted them to do.

The Apaches and Mojaves were friends and often traded with each other. When some Mojaves came (after the girls had been there a year), the Apaches sold the sisters for two horses, some vegetables, beads, and blankets. Their new owners gave them no food until the fourth day of their new journey of about 350 miles. At the Mojave camp they were received with more insults. For some time they had to work for their captors. Even when they walked seven miles to get berries, they were cruelly beaten if they didn't fill the baskets. For hours at a time they were compelled to sing. Olivia's face was tattooed with lines running from her mouth down her chin.

Fortunately for the Oatman girls, the

Olivia started for Fort Yuma

wife of the chief, Espanesy, took a liking to them and supplied them with some blankets and food. After this they did not have to slave for the others as before, but were given a small plot of ground, with some seeds so they could raise corn, beans, and melons.

Mary Ann, who had a much weaker constitution than Olivia, had been failing for some time. When she finally died, the Mojaves wanted to burn her body, as was their custom, but the chief's wife got permission for Olivia to bury her in the little plot they had cultivated together. Olivia too was weakened by lack of food. The chief's wife, who had refused to give dying Indians any of the seed corn she had saved, took some of the precious grain, ground it and made gruel for Olivia; and no doubt saved her life.

ALL THIS time, in California, Lorenzo was working to get money to explore the country around Fort Yuma. He wrote letters to various people and to state officials for help—all without success. At Yuma there was a good-hearted man, Henry Grinnell, an employee of the Quartermaster, who from the time the girls were taken captive had encouraged Lorenzo.

In the latter part of 1855 rumors came to California that the Oatman girls had married Indian chiefs and were living with the Mojaves near the Colorado. Next came word from Fransisco, a Yuma, that at a village ten days' journey from Fort Yuma there was a young white girl whom the Mojaves would release (under certain conditions) to the commanding officer of the fort. The negotiations were brought about by Henry Grinnell.

News reached Olivia through an Indian runner that Fransisco was coming for her. She was almost afraid to hope, for fear the Mojaves wouldn't let her go. When Fransisco arrived with the requisition from Col. Burke, the Indians couldn't understand the message. Olivia took the packet, and although it was the first English writing she had seen for five years, she was able to read the large round letters. She explained the message to the Indians who agreed to give her up for six pounds of white beads, four blankets, and several trinkets. The chief's wife cried as if she were giving up her own daughter.

Olivia started for Fort Yuma with Fransisco, and although the trail was very rough during the nine days' journey, she didn't mind it so much now, even though she had to swim the Colorado several times. Henry Grinnell met Olivia and her guide some distance from Fort Yuma. She was so tanned from exposure to the sun and wind, and so changed by the paint, tattooing, and Indian dress, he could hardly believe she was a white woman.

Upon her arrival at the fort on February 22, 1856, she could remember very little English. But she soon began to get back to her normal self, told them of her terrible experiences, and denied that she had ever married an Indian. She was taken to El Monte, California, where she and Lorenzo had a happy reunion.

The Los Angeles *Star* devoted much space to this, printing an interview with Olivia on April 19, 1856. She was described as "a rather pretty girl," "fast recovering her ability to speak English," "with lady-like deportment, pleasing manners, and an amiable disposition."

The State Legislature voted her the sum of $1500, but there is no record that she actually received it. She and Lorenzo lived in El Monte with the Ira Thompsons, a family that had started from Missouri in the same wagon train as the Oatmans. Then in May, 1856, Harrison Oatman, a cousin from Oregon territory, took over the guardianship of the two orphans.

Lorenzo and his sister stayed in Oregon just a short time, and when they returned to California they related the many details of their experiences to the Reverend Royal Stratton of Yreka. The minister wrote a book about them, which was published by a New York firm and ran into several editions, selling more than 30,000 copies.

Later, Olivia went to New York with the Stratton family, and in 1865 married John S. Fairchild in Rochester. She died in Sherman, Texas, leaving a story that is one of the few frontier tragedies with a happy ending.

A GOOD MAN, turning outlaws from the owlhoot trail . . . a fool, thinking they'd not go back. . . .

Outlaw Saint

By WAYNE D. OVERHOLSER

JOHNNY KELLY knew he was in outlaw country the moment he topped the high ridge separating Wallowa Valley from Storm Creek Canyon. He rode slack in the saddle, a dusty, bone-weary man with a thousand miles of trail behind him. Now he tensed, scanning the narrow rock-walled cleft below him, deep in shadow with the sun dropping toward the craggy peaks of the Wallowas. There was no stirring in the vast emptiness of space, no sign of human life, yet Kelly knew life was there.

He started his buckskin down the narrow trail, hand on gun butt. He realized what he was riding into, and by some standards that realization made him a fool for going, but those were not Johnny Kelly's standards. Kelly was both a realist and a dreamer. He had been dreamer enough to ride a thousand miles because he had heard a dying man talk about a girl who lived in Storm Creek Canyon; he was realist enough to estimate his chances for survival and know it would take both imagination and gun skill to bring him out alive.

Kelly had been told there was only the one way to the bottom of the canyon, so they'd have a guard out. He had been in outlaw hide-outs before, and he understood how these men lived, never free from the shadow of constant fear. Either they must sleep so lightly that the slightest sound brought them upright, hand gripping gun butt, or crawl

"Licking Whang Miller is one way to commit suicide," she said

into a hole like this to seek a moment's security while one of them kept watch.

Kelly rode slowly and warily, eyes searching the side of the cliff, expecting to hear a warning bullet every step his buckskin took. But it didn't come. He reached the creek and dismounted to let his horse drink. He dropped to his knees upstream from his mount and still watching and listening for human sight and sound, dipped water from the swift creek to his mouth with his left hand, right still on gun butt.

He rose, sleeving water from his mouth, eyes raised to the trail that lay like a grey ribbon carefully looped against the side of the cliff. That was when the girl said, "It's all right, stranger."

Kelly jumped and wheeled toward the voice, nerves wire-tight, gun lifting from leather in an instinctive motion. Then he saw her, and tension went out of him. She was leaning against a pine tree not more than thirty feet upstream, a Winchester in her hand. He took a long look, saying nothing, for this was the girl who had brought him here. She had been in his mind through all these weeks. Now he saw her and he was not disappointed.

Lola Harrigan. That was her name and somehow it fitted her. Black hair and black eyes that stabbed him with their directness. Her skin was darkly tanned; her body was round and strong and it seemed to Kelly that he had never seen a woman as fully alive as this Lola Harrigan. Suddenly she smiled, her teeth making a white flash against the darkness of her skin.

"I know," she said. "You're on the dodge and you're hunting Matt Harrigan's place because somebody back along the trail told you Matt would hide you out. All right. You're here."

He took off his hat. "Sorry, ma'am. Seeing you suddenlike this way made me forget my manners. I'm Johnny Kelly." He stood better than six feet in his spike-heeled boots, legs saddle-bowed.

Perhaps there were prettier girls or girls with better figures, but Kelly was sure that his first impression was right. Everything about Lola Harrigan added up to what was close to perfection.

Suddenly she sobered as if sensing what was in his mind. She said carefully, "Most men who ride in here either have no manners or bad ones." She motioned down the creek. "You'll find Dad in the cabin."

"I'm in no hurry. If you're going home, I'll ride with you."

"I didn't ride up," she said quickly. "It isn't far, so I walked. Go ahead."

"It's a big country. I might get lost."

She stood regarding him for a moment as if puzzled, her breasts under her faded calico dress rising and falling with her breathing. She said, "Look, stranger. I cook here. I'll do your washing and I'll patch your socks. That's part of the deal when we hide you out, but that's all. Now drift."

Kelly was remembering some of the things Larry Doane had said before he'd died, that Lola Harrigan could be as cold as a chill December morning, that a man got nowhere with her if he pushed too hard, and the only woman who had ever slapped him was Lola, when he had tried to kiss her. Still Doane had been on his way back to Lola Harrigan with a filled money belt when bounty-hunting Frank Jepp had got close enough to drill him in the back.

"If I get lost," Kelly said, "I'll hold it against you."

He put his hat on and swung into the saddle, still watching the girl. Her face had gone entirely sober. He reined his buckskin downstream, and when he looked back, he saw that she was still standing there, her gaze following him.

Lola Harrigan was not the kind of girl a man expected to find in an outlaw hideout. Larry Doane had said that, too. Kelly thought of her as he rode, picturing her in his mind and comparing reality with what Larry Doane had told him, and satisfaction was in him. Doane, lying there beside the waterhole in Robbers' Roost, had not exaggerated.

Kelly followed the creek around a sharp turn. The canyon widened out here, giving room for a hay field on one side of the stream; corrals, a log shed, and cabins on the other. He put his buckskin across the creek, noting the one big cabin set hard against the cliff, a lean-to on one end. That

would be Harrigan's house. The lean-to, Doane had said, was Lola's room. Two more cabins downstream had likely been built for Harrigan's boarders.

THE HOT afternoon sun was still bright here where it had room to reach the canyon bottom. Kelly reined up in front of the big cabin and dismounted, eyes swinging over the buildings and catching no movement. It wasn't right. Kelly moved around the hitch pole, ears keening the air for human sound. When it did come, it was as unexpected as the girl's voice had been.

"You can stop right there, mister," a man called from the shed. "Don't move."

Kelly couldn't spot the man, but he could see the rifle barrel poked between two pine logs of the shed wall. So Kelly stood as he had been ordered, carefully keeping his right hand away from gun butt. The seconds dragged out into minutes. Sweat beaded Kelly's forehead. The creek made a liquid murmur to his left. There was no shade, no place to hide if he made a break. The door of the big cabin was closed. Perhaps locked. Anyhow it was too far away. He'd be cut down before he'd taken two steps. There was nothing to do but to stand motionless while his nerves knotted and sweat ran down his cheeks.

The outlaw in the shed would hold him there until he fried. Kelly pegged the man's caliber before he saw him, the kind who had learned his tricks from the Apaches. Kelly was surprised that Matt Harrigan would give a man like this refuge. According to Doane, Matt Harrigan was as near perfect as a man could be. Now Kelly puzzled over that, remembering that Doane had been away for a year, that even a man of Harrigan's nature could change.

"You've got guts," the outlaw in the shed said. "I figgered you'd make a break before now. I aim to drill you when you do. I'd do it anyway, but the old man might be watching."

"Or maybe you want an excuse," Kelly said. "You come out of there with your gun in leather, and I'll give you an excuse."

The man's laugh was like the grating of granite. "I'll wait you out, stranger."

Again there was silence. Then the sun was hidden and shadows ran across the canyon floor and the air cooled. Still Kelly did not move. He saw the girl come down the trail, the Winchester in one hand, a string of trout in the other, and worry gnawed at him. But Lola Harrigan was not one to be worried about. She caught the situation the instant she crossed the foot log.

"Come out of there, Whang," Lola called.

No answer. The girl walked toward Kelly in quick graceful strides, anger dancing in her eyes. She said, "Whang, I blacksnaked you once. I'll do it again if I have to."

ADMIRATION for her was in Johnny Kelly. She would go into the shed regardless of the rifle barrel poked between the logs. He said softly, "No sense getting yourself killed."

"I won't. I know what he's made of." She raised her voice. "Whang, I'm taking these fish inside. Then I'm getting the black snake."

The rifle barrel disappeared. The man came out of the shed, a stooped hulk of a man with a red-bearded face and arms that were abnormally long and thick for a man of his height. He carried his Winchester in his right hand, left rubbing his flat, wide-nostrilled nose as he shuffled toward the girl.

"Now Miss Lola, don't you go getting mad," the man said, a foolish grin on his meaty lips. "I was just holding this here feller so he wouldn't do no harm. Your pa and Smoky and Long Tom rode down the creek while ago, and I figgered it wasn't smart to let this hombre float around here."

"This is Whang Miller," Lola whispered. "He's bad."

Kelly had heard of Whang Miller, a vicious killer who hid his foxlike brain behind a simpleton's grin. He was wanted in Idaho for murder, and again Kelly was surprised that Matt Harrigan would give refuge to this sort of outlaw. There were grades of outlaws the same as there were grades of lawmen, and it was Johnny

Kelly's feeling that this Whang Miller belonged on the lowest rung of the ladder.

Miller shuffled closer, covertly watching Kelly while he pretended to be looking at Lola. He said, "What do you want me to do with him? I think maybe it would be a good idea to lock him up in the back cabin till Matt gets here. Might be a U. S. Marshal for all we know."

"We'll take that chance," Lola said crisply. "You go to the cabin. I'll take this fellow with me."

"It ain't safe," Miller argued. "Your pa wouldn't like that."

Miller was close now, eyes momentarily fixed on the girl's face, a hunger in them that infuriated Kelly. He struck the man, a driving right that swiveled Miller's head on his thick neck. He let out a bawl of pain and went back a step, bringing his Winchester up, hammer back, but he never fired. Kelly caught him with another short right that knocked the big man off his feet. He jerked the rifle out of Miller's slack grip as he fell and handed it to Lola.

The outlaw rose to hands and knees, shaking his head and cursing in a low deep-chested rumble. He spit out a mouthful of blood and charged up from his position like a bull. Kelly understood his kind, dark-tempered, ruled by passion, possessed of a killer's evil soul. There was only one thought in his mind now, to beat Johnny Kelly into the dust and stomp his life out, but catching Kelly long enough to beat him down was the problem.

Kelly hammered him with a left, turned aside from Miller's great fists, and let the man go by. The outlaw swung back, growling his rage, this time badly hurt. Kelly met him, sledging him with both fists, but Miller kept coming, got hold of him and squeezed. Breath whistled out of Kelly's lungs. He would never have another chance. He grabbed a fistful of the outlaw's hair, jerked his head back so that his chin made a wide target, and let his right go. He felt the paralyzing shock of the blow run up his arm. He stepped out of Miller's relaxed grip and rubbed his knuckles. The outlaw, with nothing to hold him up, fell heavily and dust drifted around him.

Lola had no thought for her own safety

Lola still stood there, the string of trout in one hand, Miller's Winchester in the other. Her .30-30 was on the ground in front of her. Now she threw the outlaw's rifle down and picked her's up. She said slowly. "There are many ways of committing suicide. Licking Whang Miller is one." Turning, she walked quickly into the house.

KELLY tossed Miller's Winchester behind the horse trough, searched him and found a long-bladed knife in his boot, but no other gun. Then he sat down on the end of the log trough and built a smoke. He had it going when the outlaw came around. He said, "Miller, as far as I'm concerned, I squared up for you holding me out here in the sun, but if you figger you're still owing me something, come ahead."

Miller sat up and rubbed his face. He stared at Kelly, animal-like cunning creeping into his eyes. He muttered through bruised lips, "You licked me fair, mister. We'll call it square." He sat there for a time, feeling gingerly of his face. Then he said, "You took my Winchester and my knife and licked hell out of me. Now what are you going to do?"

"Nothing. You just sit there."

Miller swore, but made no effort to rise. Presently horses came upstream and splashed across the creek. Miller said, "That's old Matt coming in now. He ain't gonna like this. You give me my weepons, and I'll forget what you done to me."

"I don't aim to forget," Kelly said.

Kelly rose, thumbs hooked in gunbelt, eyes on the men who were riding in. The one in the center would be Matt Harrigan, an oldish man with a gentle face and a chin beard and dark eyes that probed Kelly as he reined up.

"Evening," Harrigan said, and waited.

The men with Harrigan had pulled their horses up and sat their saddles, tense, eyes narrowed. They were typical riders of the dark trails, one short and slender with perfect features that gave him a too-handsome look, the other a rail of a man well over six feet with pale blue eyes and a bushy brown mustache that partly hid a cruel slash of a mouth.

"I'm Johnny Kelly." Kelly held out his hand and Harrigan gripped it. "I'm job-hunting."

"Maybe I can use you," Harrigan said carefully. He motioned to the slender man. "This is Smoky Beck." He jerked a thumb at the tall one. "Long Tom Creel."

Kelly nodded and stepped back so that he could watch Miller as well as the men with Harrigan. He said, "I ain't particular what I do as long as I get my bacon and beans, but I am particular who I work with." He nodded at Miller. "I'd sooner sleep with a sidewinder than ride with that huckleberry."

"Me, too," Miller choked. "He rides in here on the prod and kicks hell out of me."

Long Tom Creel swung down and for a moment his horse was between him and Kelly. When he stepped forward, his gun was in his hand. "Stand pat, Kelly. Matt, this gent's got the wrong smell about him."

"He sure as hell has," Miller fumed. "I've got a rope in my cabin that'll just about fit his neck."

"Behave, Whang," Harrison said testily. "Tom, you're moving a mite fast. Kelly, what was the trouble over?"

Kelly told him, and added, "I rode a long ways to get here, Harrigan. I expected different treatment."

"Put up your gun, Tom," Harrigan said sharply. "You'll have different treatment, Kelly." He dismounted. "Put my horse away, Whang. Next time you jump the track thataway, you're fired."

Miller laughed. "Matt, you might as well quit talking fairy tales. I paid you my board money, and I aim to eat it up. By that time I figger it'll be safe to light out for Walla Walla."

"I don't reckon I'll put my iron up yet, Matt," Long Tom Creel said darkly. "I'm thinking this adds up to the wrong answer. I've got a notion this gent's got a U. S. Marshal's badge in his pocket. If he has, I'll slit his throat myself."

SOMETHING knifed Johnny Kelly's insides. There were different ways of asking for a hide-out when a man rode into a ranch, but Larry Doane hadn't told Kelly the method to use with Matt Harrigan. He said quickly, "I didn't figger I needed the work, Beck. Larry Doane told me where to come and how to get here."

"Well, now," Harrigan said, pleased, "how is Larry?"

"Dead."

They froze, all four of them. Lola had

come out of the big cabin to call supper, but no word came from her. She stared at Kelly, horror gripping her. Then Kelly knew he shouldn't have told them, for Long Tom Creel said, "I'm guessing you killed him."

Kelly swung on Creel, rage a hot flame in him. "You want to make that talk stick, Creel?"

The tall man still held his gun in his hand. Now a wicked grin slid along his mouth. "You may be fast, Bucko, but I don't reckon you're fast enough to get your iron smoking before I drill you. Want to try?"

"What's the matter with you, Tom?" Lola called. She reached inside the cabin for her Winchester and lined it on Creel. "Put your gun up or I'll shoot it out of your hand."

Creel hesitated, cursing in a low tone. Beck said, "You better jump, Tom. She shoots damned straight."

It was then that Johnny Kelly understood how it was. Matt Harrigan was no man to handle the trail wolves who sought refuge here on Storm Creek. It was Lola who kept them straight, ruling with an iron hand. Larry Doane had said, "She's got more solid courage than any man I ever saw."

Slowly Creel holstered his gun. He said darkly, "I don't like it. I can spot a lawman a mile off, Matt, and I tell you this hairpin has got the smell on him."

"I talked to him when he came down the trail," Lola said. "I thought he was all right and I still do."

It was Kelly's guess that Smoky Beck was the most level-headed of the three and at the same time the most dangerous. Now Beck said, "I reckon it'll be all right if Kelly don't try riding out." He winked at Kelly. "When we pay our board here, we usually figger on staying quite a spell. How about grub, Lola?"

"It's ready," she said.

"Then we better get at eating it," Beck said.

Still grumbling, Creel led his horse toward the trough. When Creel and Miller were out of earshot, Beck said, "Makes a difference what a man's wanted for. Long Tom's got a rope waiting for him in Montana. Whang's got the same in Idaho. Me, I just knocked over a bank in Nevada. What are you on the dodge for?"

Kelly hesitated. Then he said, "Me'n' Larry took a mine payroll off a Utah stage."

"And Larry got his." Beck scratched his slender nose, suspicion in his eyes. "What happened to the payroll?"

"It's still in Utah. We hit for Robbers' Roost. We got there all right, but Larry was packing a slug. Our horses were done in and after Larry died, I had to walk out, so I cached the payroll."

BECK nodded. "Tough luck, but a man can always go back. I've got enough *dinero* hidden around between here and the Rio Grande to make me a millionaire, but I'm sticking here till I figger they've kind of forgotten me." He stood looking at the big cabin, frowning. "We've got a living here, Kelly. Don't mess it up."

It was a good meal with Matt Harrigan doing most of the talking. Whang Miller said nothing. He ate with wolfish haste, chomping loudly and smacking his lips with gusto. As soon as he had finished his dried apple pie, he rose and went out. A moment later Long Tom Creel followed. Beck leaned back in his chair and patted his stomach, hungry eyes on Lola.

"You're the purtiest 'n' best cook in the world, Lola," Beck said. "Long as you can catch the fish as well as cook 'em, I say you've got a raise coming. How about it, Matt?"

Harrigan smiled his gentle smile and filled his pipe. "No matter how much we raise her wages, Smoky, we'll never pay her enough."

"Get along," Lola said sharply. "I've got dishes to wash."

She hated her life, Kelly saw. He was remembering a lot of things Larry Doane had said. About how she was too good for this place, that sooner or later some of Matt's boarders would get out of hand. Doane had intended to go straight, to make enough money to go back after Lola and

ask her to marry him, but his luck had been bad. Old habits were strong in him, and he'd turned to his former profession and held up a stagecoach between Price and Greenriver. That was what had put bounty-hunting Frank Jepp on his trail.

There was something else here, too, and Kelly wasn't sure whether Lola liked the idea or not. Smoky Beck was in love with her. That, Kelly guessed, was what the outlaw had meant when he'd said, "Don't mess it up."

Matt Harrigan rose. "Let's let her have the place." He fished in his pocket for a match. "Smoky, I don't want trouble. What about Whang and Long Tom?"

Lola was stacking dishes. Now she turned to Beck, suddenly tense. "I won't go on living this way, Smoky. We've had some bad ones here, but those two are the worst."

"You can't expect wanted men to be like lambs," Matt said mildly.

"I don't expect them to be coyotes, either," Lola said. "Give their money back and tell them to slope out of here."

"I can't," Harrigan protested.

"She's right," Kelly said. "Miller is the kind who kills for fun. You never know what a hardcase like that will do."

"I'll talk to them," Beck called from the door. "Kelly, don't try riding out."

"This is where I aimed to get," Kelly said. "Now I'm here, I'll stay a while."

HARRIGAN scratched his match on the wall and sucked the flame into the pipe. When he had it going, he blew the match out. "Let's sit on the porch, Kelly."

Kelly hesitated, looking at Lola and wanting to talk to her, but knowing it would have to wait. He followed Harrigan outside and sat down with his back to a post.

"I want to tell you about what I'm doing," Harrigan said. "I don't run this place for profit. I take some pay because it costs us to keep the outfit going. I have a few head of cattle to make it look right, but they don't make me much. What I aim to do is to let the boys have a chance to get started right." He took his pipe out of his mouth and leaned forward. "Kelly, I served time in the Yuma pen, and if I had to choose between it and hell, I'd take hell."

Kelly had heard the story from Doane, but he only nodded and waited for Harrigan to go on.

"When I did get out, I had a tough time keeping out of trouble," Harrigan went on. "I couldn't make it and finally knocked over a bank. I got out of Arizona and drifted north. Got a job in Montana punching cows. I was married before I went to Yuma, but my wife had died. I sent for Lola. That was how they got wind of me. She was fifteen then. We had to bust the breeze getting out of Montana and wound up here. That was why I started this business. If the law had let me alone, I'd have gone straight in Montana. There's plenty of other boys the same. I aim to give 'em a chance to stay out of trouble until the heat cools down. Sometimes the law will give 'em a pardon. If they're in too deep, the only thing they can do is to get a long ways off and keep out of trouble."

Actually it didn't work that way. Larry Doane had known it. He'd told Kelly of a dozen men Harrigan had helped who had gone back to the same life they'd left. Even Doane, better than most men who followed the dim trails, had turned to robbing stages when he found he couldn't get what he wanted by honest living.

"Well, that's the story." Harrigan took a long breath. "I haven't got much time left, and I made my share of trouble when I was younger. I hope I've made up for a little of it. Now tell me about Larry."

Kelly told him the same as he had Beck. When he was done, darkness had fallen, the last of the twilight blotted out by the canyon walls. Lampshine from the kitchen where Lola was finishing the dishes washed out through the open door and made a long yellow patch on the trodden earth of the yard. Harrigan sat in silence, pulling on his pipe.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Harrigan said at last. "Larry was a mite reckless, but he was crazy about Lola. I thought he'd go straight on her account."

Kelly moved close to Harrigan. "Look, Matt. Lola is the real reason for me being here. You can't keep her in a place like this with Whang Miller around."

"Even Miller respects a good woman," Harrigan said. "She's safe."

Harrigan was wrong on that, too, but there was no use arguing. Kelly knew how it was. Bad men turned pious were always stubborn in their righteousness, so he tried another approach.

"Matt, suppose the sheriff brings a posse after your boys. Where will Lola be then?"

"It won't happen," Harrigan said crossly. "I've been here for three years and we've never had any trouble."

But it would happen because there were bounty hunters like Frank Jepp, tough gunslicks who would shoot a man in the back if it would turn up a reward for them. Those were the men who would nose around and make trouble. Unless Kelly had entirely misjudged Frank Jepp, the bounty hunter was on his way to Storm Creek, or perhaps was already here.

"Larry aimed to get Lola and take her out of here," Kelly said earnestly. "He can't do the job, but I can. Let me take her to Portland where she'll be safe. Let her live her life among decent people."

Harrigan tapped his pipe against a post. "I can't do without her. Don't speak of it again."

Harrigan turned toward the house, a thoroughly angry man. Kelly stared after him, hating him for his pious blindness. "Matt." Kelly rose and stood in the yellow lamplight. Harrigan turned to face him. "There's a greater hell than Yuma. You'll live in it if anything happens to Lola. You'll know you were to blame."

Harrigan looked very old and tired. He said, "Kelly, I'm beginning to wonder if Long Tom is right. Who are you?"

It was no time to tell the truth, so Kelly answered. "I'm Johnny Kelly who rode like hell to get out of Utah."

Harrington turned and went on into the cabin, heels cracking against the puncheon floor. Kelly, staring after him, sensed that Matt Harrigan doubted him as much as the others.

A WIND carrying the damp coolness of the high country ran down the canyon, and the smell of the pines was a rich fragrance in Kelly's nostrils. There was no sound but the clatter of dishes from the kitchen and Storm Creek's ceaseless song as it dropped toward the Snake. And Johnny Kelly who had seldom known fear was afraid, a shocking fear born of a sense of impending failure.

Kelly moved away from the light to the corner of the porch and hunkered there, the tip of his cigarette a small red dot in

Kelly tried to pull free, but

the darkness. The way Larry Doane had told it, the job of getting Lola Harrigan out of the canyon would be an easy one. Now Kelly knew it was next to impossible, and he cursed himself for setting into motion forces that would bring destruction to Harrigan's outlaw hide-out. It had seemed like a good idea to let evil destroy itself upon evil. Perhaps the idea was good, but it wasn't going to work as he had hoped because he couldn't get Lola out in time.

He finished his cigarette and tossed it into the yard, sparks showering the darkness. He sat motionless, thinking, seeing his only hope in Smoky Beck, but it was a thin hope, for he judged that Beck's love for Lola was not strong enough to make him risk his own life.

Kelly rolled another smoke and lighted it, the match flame bright upon his dark high-boned face. Kitchen sounds had died. Then the lamp went out. There was no light in any of the cabins. It was entirely dark except for the thin starshine from the ribbon of sky.

Steps across the porch then. Kelly start-

for that moment old Matt Harrigan's grip was like steel

ed to reach for his gun and let his hand drop away when he saw it was Lola. He said, "It was a good supper."

"Thanks." The girl sat down beside him. "Who are you, Johnny Kelly?"

"Larry said you were the best cook in the world," Kelly said as if he hadn't heard the question. "He was coming back for you which same was a plumb crazy thing to do because every lawman in Oregon was still looking for him." Kelly paused and added, "But I guess every man does crazy things for a woman."

"You're a little crazy yourself, aren't you, Johnny Kelly?"

"I reckon I am. You heard me talking to Matt?"

"I heard." She took a long breath. "I want out of here. I'm afraid. The only way to handle men like Miller or Creel is with a blacksnake or a gun, but someday I won't be quick enough."

"There's good outlaws the same as other men are good. Larry Doane was one. He loved you."

Again she took a long breath. "I know," she said, "but I didn't love him. I'll never love any outlaw. I hate everything about this life. It's all I've known for four years, and I can't stand it any longer."

"We'll make a run for it."

"No, I can't do it. Dad's changed since he's been here. I think he's afraid to die and he wants to make up for what he's done. He believes this is the way to do it, and he needs me."

"You don't owe him anything, Lola."

"He's my father," she said simply.

He reached for her hand. "There'll be trouble in a day or two, Lola. Maybe before morning. I know because I started it. I've got to get you out of here before then."

She drew away from him, asking again, "Who are you, Johnny Kelly?"

Still he could not tell her the truth any more than he could have told Smoky Beck or Matt Harrigan. "Just Johnny Kelly," he said.

"Were you with Larry when he held up the stage?" Her eyes were wide and honest as she asked him.

THAT much of the truth he could tell her. "No. I was in Robbers' Roost in Utah. Frank Jepp had Larry cornered and had worked around to his back. He'd drilled Larry when I took cards. No good reason for me to take a hand except that I don't like Frank Jepp, and I don't like to see a man shot like a cornered rat. Jepp got enough of it after I tagged him. I stayed with Larry three days until he died. He talked a lot. About you and about Matt. He asked me to get you out of here."

For a long time she didn't say anything. He felt the pressure of her shoulder, smelled the fragrance of her hair. Johnny Kelly was not a sentimental man, nor was he one to lose his head in a rush of passion, but he knew he was in love with Lola Harrigan. It seemed as if he had known her from the day Larry Doane had first mentioned her; he had grown to love her then and seeing her had only made him certain. Now he looked at her in the darkness, her face a blurred oval, but he could not tell whether she believed him. He could only hope.

"I can't go," she said at last. "Dad needs me."

"But he's all wrong," Kelly said louder than he realized. "He thinks he's helping men get a new start, but Larry said he didn't know of any who had gone straight since he'd stayed here. All Matt's doing is staying outside the law like he's always been."

She gripped his arm, breathing, "Not so loud. None of them trust you."

He heard Harrigan's steps as he came out of the house, heard the old man's long sighing breath. Harrigan said, "I tried to listen because I thought you'd tell Lola the truth, but I couldn't hear anything except that last part about me being outside the law. That proves what Miller and Creel thought about you. You're a lawman, and there's only one way we can deal with a lawman."

Lola came to her feet to face him. "No, Dad. Are you blind? If he is a lawman, this might be your way out. Maybe he can get a pardon for you."

"I would not betray my friends to clear

my own name," Matt Harrigan thundered.

"Did you ever think about Lola?" Kelly asked.

"She's my daughter. She will be obedient."

Harrigan said it with grim finality and again Kelly felt the man's sense of self-righteousness. He had selected his path of compensation, and only death would detour him from it.

"And you're a fool," Kelly said hotly. "Larry Doane thought you were next to God, but he sure had you pegged wrong."

"Give me your gun," Harrigan said. "You knew the risks you took in coming here."

"I never give my gun to anybody," Kelly said. "Don't make me hurt you."

Smoky Beck's soft laugh floated out of the darkness. "I don't cotton to bounty chasers. Maybe I'll do the hurting."

Kelly's hand was on gun butt, but he didn't draw. Lola was still beside him and she'd be hit if the shooting started. Besides, Beck's shape was only a vague blur in the blackness, an uncertain target at best. If it had only been his safety to think of, he'd have made the fight then, but he had Lola to consider.

"I'm no bounty chaser," Kelly said. "Larry asked me to get Lola out of here. That's my reason for risking my neck in this hell hole."

Beck's laugh was a taunting slap. "You may have judged me for a fool, Kelly, but you're wrong. You're the fool if you think I'd believe you rode in here just to get a girl you'd never seen."

"That's all in the way a man looks at it, Smoky. Money is the only thing you figger is important. I've got another notion."

"Takes a lot of people to make up the world, don't it, Matt?" Beck moved toward the house, "Don't move, Lola. I've got a scattergun, Kelly. If you start anything, Lola gets hurt. I want your gun."

FEAR squeezed Johnny Kelly then. He had judged Beck to be the most dangerous man of the bunch, but he had hoped Beck's love for Lola would put them on the same side. Now he saw he was completely wrong. Beck was no different than the others. His own safety came first.

"It's no good, Smoky," Kelly said. "You're gonna have company before long. You may need my gun."

Again Beck laughed. "On whose side? If you're fetching a posse, you'll get the first slug."

"He wouldn't do that," Lola cried.

"I'll take that gun," Beck pressed. "If we're having a smoke out tonight, I don't want this lying son at my back."

Kelly heard the click of the shotgun being cocked. It was a moment of decision, and either way it was wrong for Johnny Kelly. If he gave up his gun, he was only making sure of his death a few moments later. If he held onto it, he'd die now with buckshot in his belly. Lola, still standing beside him, could not escape.

"Get Lola out of here," Kelly raged. "You're lower'n any sidewinder I ever met up with."

"Right now Lola ain't important," Beck snarled. "You are. Drop your iron and let me hear it. I'll give you five seconds."

Kelly would have tried for his gun then, for he knew that once the showdown came, Lola would be better off dead than alive. Her father, silenced by the pressure of danger, would be of no help at all. But Kelly didn't make the try because the thunder of horse's hoofs came to them, a running horse traveling at a wild pace downstream.

"What is it?" Harrigan asked hoarsely. "Is Whang guarding the trail?"

"Yeah, that'll be Whang," Beck said. "Hold it, Kelly. I'm damned curious about this."

"You want me to tell you?" Kelly asked.

But Beck didn't answer. The rider was coming across the creek, water lancing whitely away from the driving hoofs of his horse. He called out, "Smoky, where the hell are you?"

Beck answered, "Here."

Miller pulled up in front of the cabin, his voice high with panic, "Smoky, somebody's coming down the trail. I called, but he didn't answer. If it had been any of our side, he'd have given the word. You reckon a posse's following Kelly in?"

"All right, Kelly," Beck said ominously. "Who is it?"

"Maybe the sheriff," Kelly prodded. "Maybe he's got a dozen men on the rim."

"No," Beck said thoughtfully. "He'd have brought 'em down if he had."

"Want me to let the dynamite go, Smoky?" Miller asked.

"Who is it, Kelly?" Beck demanded.

"A gent by name of Frank Jepp. He's the one who shot Larry Doane."

Every man who had ever followed the owlhoot know of Frank Jepp. For a moment there was stunned silence. Then Beck said, "I guess we'd better let that blast go, Whang, and we'll let Kelly present Jepp with our regards. That'll be better than a bullet just in case the sheriff does come nosing around."

Kelly shoved Lola away then, right hand slicing for his gun, but he had not counted on Matt Harrigan. The old man was on him, gripping his hands to his sides as he called, "Don't shoot, Smoky."

Kelly tried to pull free, tried to get his right hand loose, but for that moment Matt Harrigan's grip was like steel. Then the roof fell on Johnny Kelly and he spilled forward off the porch.

THERE was no measuring of time for Kelly. Men's angry voices came to him vaguely. Curses. Hoofs on rock. He felt the hammering beat of pain in his head, heard Beck say, "Right there, Whang."

Miller grabbed him by the shoulder and dragged him across the rocks. He tried to lunge free, but it was useless. His hands and feet were tied. Miller dropped him and drove a vicious foot into his ribs.

"All right, Smoky. We'll blow him right through hell's front door."

"Got it going, Tom?" Beck called.

"All set," Creel answered.

Kelly heard the outlaws scurry to safety. He saw the glow of the lighted fuse, tried to break the ropes that tied his hands, and panic gripped him. There was no use. He rolled over, fingers seeking a sharp rock to saw the ropes apart, and failing. Time was running out. In a few seconds he'd be dead, smashed by tons of rock from the trail above him, and Lola was still on Storm Creek. Johnny Kelly's death would be as futile as Larry Doane's had been.

"Johnny, where are you?"

Lola! Somehow she had given Beck and the others the slip. "Run," he shouted. "You haven't got time."

But there was no thought of time in Lola Harrigan's mind, no thought of safety for herself. She was bending over him, a knife slashing the ropes. Then he was on his feet, running, an arm around Lola. Beck and the rest would be hunting for them the instant they discovered that Lola was not with her father. And Frank Jepp was here somewhere, hiding, because that was his way, seeking a place of concealment so he could shoot down the men he had come after without danger to himself.

It came then, a roar and a trembling of the earth. They were knocked on their faces, and dust was all around them. Rocks showered the ground like giant hailstones. A boulder hammered into the earth three feet beyond Kelly's head. His arm was around Lola, holding her hard against him, her hair on his cheek. She was sobbing, close to hysteria, but she was able to tell him she was all right. For a moment he lay there, afraid to breathe, thankful only that they were alive. Then he remembered Smoky Beck and Whang Miller and Long Tom Creel. He remembered he did not have a gun. He had escaped one death to face another.

"Johnny, somebody's hurt." Lola pulled herself upright. "Over here."

Frank Jepp! Kelly heard him then. Ahead of them along the creek. He must have come down the trail when Miller had ridden to the cabin and picked his hiding place, thinking he was safe.

They found him, chest crushed by a boulder, his feet in the creek. He stopped breathing as Kelly reached for his wrist to feel his pulse.

"Gone," Kelly muttered.

He thought of Larry Doane and felt no regret. Frank Jepp stood for everything that Kelly hated. Doane had deserved a trial. So had other men Jepp had drygulched and brought in with tales of how

they had fought it out along the trail. There had long been trouble between him and Johnny Kelly, trouble that some day would have been settled in gunsmoke if Jepp had not gone this way.

Kelly would never know exactly what had been in Jepp's mind in coming, but he had been certain the man would come. He had sent the bounty chaser a note telling him he was on his way to Storm Creek to find a hide-out that Larry Doane had told him about. When he got back, he'd settle with Jepp. It was Kelly's guess that Jepp had thought he was getting here ahead of him, but what Jepp had planned died with him.

LOLA shook Kelly's arm. "What will they do to Dad? They'll take it out on him. They'll think he should have kept me in the house."

Kelly unbuckled Jepp's gun belt and fastened it around him. He made a quick check of the Colt and dropped it back into holster. "Stay here," he said, and climbed out of the rocks along the creek to the trail. He ran downstream, stumbling and falling once. Pain rocketed through his body. He

Every owlhooter knew Frank Jepp, everyone hated the bounty hunter

had not known until that moment how many rocks had hit him after he'd been knocked down by the blast.

He reached the foot log and crossed it. A lamp had come to life in the big cabin. He heard Whang Miller bawl out a curse. "What'd you let Lola get away for, damn you?"

"You knew she'd get Kelly out of there if she could," Smoky Beck fumed. "Now chances are she's flattened out alongside Kelly."

Kelly came across the yard on the run, gun palmed, counting on the talk to cover the noise of his pounding boots. The door was open. Matt Harrigan stood backed against the wall, white-faced and trembling. He cried out, "She said she was sick. How was I to know she'd try to free Kelly?"

"If you'd used what you call a brain, you'd have known," Beck said coldly. "Now Kelly and her are both under a ton of rocks."

"This don't look good to me," Long Tom Creel said. "Jepp and Kelly wouldn't have come in here without telling the sheriff where they was headed."

"And we ain't leaving you here to tell 'em we went down the creek to the Snake," Beck snarled. "Dead men don't talk."

Harrigan started to plead for mercy, but there was no mercy in Smoky Beck. He pulled his gun and fired point-blank at the old man, giving him no chance to defend himself.

Then Kelly was in the room. Miller saw him first and fired, but it was the reflex of death that jerked the trigger, for Kelly had already driven a bullet into his heart. For that moment hell was loosed in the room, the hell of snarling lead and roaring guns. Drifting smoke and spurts of orange flame. The smell of burned powder and the shriek of life-seeking lead.

Johnny Kelly stood just inside the door, a lank, grey-eyed man whose gun lifted with each shot and was brought down to hammer out another slug. Through the drifting smoke he saw Long Tom Creel grab at his shirt front and lurch forward. Then he sprawled on his face, tried to raise himself to his hands and knees and failed. His head beat down against the floor and he died that way, blood a spreading pool around him.

Kelly had known from the first that Smoky Beck was the most dangerous man of the three, but Beck had been standing with his back to the door. That was why Kelly had driven his first shots at Miller and Creel. Then it was too late, for time had run out for Johnny Kelly. Beck wheeled and fired, the bullet striking Kelly in the thigh and knocking him off his feet as if a giant club had been swung against his legs.

Beck moved toward Kelly, firing as he came. The first bullet ripped into the floor inches from Kelly's face, driving splinters into his cheek, but the next shot was wild, for Lola Harrigan, triggering her Winchester from the porch, laced a bullet through his middle. Beck stopped, surprise shocking him. He kept his feet, lifting his gun toward the girl. It was then that Johnny Kelly, dropping hammer from where he lay on the floor, snuffed life from Smoky Beck. The outlaw, the top of his head holding a bloody hole, sprawled across the table and brought it over in a crashing fall. The lamp skittered across the floor. Within a few seconds flames leaped up from the floor, caught a curtain and blazed to the ceiling.

"Your dad," Kelly shouted, pulling himself to his one sound leg.

BUT LOLA was already past him and kneeling beside her father's body. "He's dead," she shouted above the roar of the flames. She tugged at his coat, but he was too heavy for her to move.

"Come on," Kelly bawled. "Save yourself."

She stumbled through the flames toward him, cheeks smudged, hair scorched, and reeled through the doorway, Kelly hopping beside her dragging his wounded leg. He fell, groaning as pain struck at him. She cried, "Come on. We can't stop here."

"I'll make it," he said, and crawled on to the creek.

Kelly stopped, propping himself up on an elbow to stare at the flames. She was on her knees beside him, pushing him down.

Then she slashed his pants' leg away from the wound, tore away a part of her underskirt and bound it, saying, "We'll get to a doctor tomorrow. It won't bleed too much before then."

"The trail's blowed all to hell," Kelly said. "We'll be here forever."

She shook her head. "Nobody knew it except me, but there's another way to get up on top. It's not a trail, but we can do it."

"What did Beck figger on?"

"They aimed to go downstream to the river and swim their horses across it, but I know the Snake better than they did. It's treacherous. We'll stay on this side."

She stood staring at the burning cabin, the red light of the flames falling across her slim, straight figure. She took a long breath. Then she said, "It's better this way, I guess. Dad thought he was doing right, but he was wrong. Now there's one less place for the trail wolves to hide."

She rubbed her eyes and turned toward the corral. "I'll go and saddle our horses," she said.

He watched her move away toward the corral, feeling his love for her. It was not the moment to talk of it, but there would be a time, later, when he could tell her he had turned in his U. S. Marshal's badge to come after her.

KNOW YOUR WEST

1. Better not attempt to pet any strange horse unless the owner tells you it is all right, but if he does, which is less likely to spook the horse, a pat on the neck or the nose?

2. Old-time cowboys sometimes cut off the tops of a horse's ears, calling a horse so marked a "croppy." What did such marking usually mean?

3. Touring in the vicinity of what state capital might you fish for trout in the Pecos, visit the Glorieta Battlefield of the Civil War, various ancient cliff dwellings, native Chimayo blanket weavers, San Ildefonso Indian Pueblo, and (if they'll let you) a town where atomic bomb laboratories are located?

4. Are young porcupines usually born with or without quills?

5. You are traveling in Arizona less than 100 miles from the Grand Canyon and come to a town with lots of sawmills and pine sawlogs in huge piles all over the place. Where are you?

6. Brazos Bill said he had "just been chawin' it with the Old Man an' he was shore hornin' the brush!" What did he mean?

7. What is tabosa?

8. This one is a pun-just-for-fun gag: If you see one squatter chasing three trespassers off his place, what time is it?

9. You have seen the ivory elk-teeth often worn as watch charms by members of the B.P.O.E. — how many of these teeth (really vestigial tusks) does one live, four-legged elk or wapiti possess?

10. Could an average man lift a new-born buffalo calf?

——Rattlesnake Robert

You will find the answers to these questions on page 93. Score yourself 2 points for each question you answer correctly. 20 is a perfect score. If your total is anywhere from 16 to 20, you're well acquainted with the customs and history of the cow-country. If your total score is anywhere from 8 to 14, you will have things to learn. If you're below 8, better get busy polishing up your knowledge of the West.

LOCAL

He walked around the car and looked at the three holes in the windshield

THERE'S nothing like having your chief suspect

handy when you set out to track down a bushwacker

TALENT

By WILLIAM FREEMAN HOUGH

TOM KEATS was less than two miles from Lobo Junction when he came upon Gil Evans' battered old car, its rusty radiator smashed against a boulder rimming the rutted road. There were two bullet holes through the windshield; another slug had ripped a bright scar along the engine hood. Gil lay across the steering wheel, blood leaking from a crease across his bald skull.

Tom swung down from his nervous horse and hurried to the car. He straightened Gil up and felt for the old man's pulse. It still jerked spasmodically, and Tom gently lifted the slight form out to cradle it in his arms. He glanced at the jumble of packages in the rear, swore softly and went back to his horse. After some effort he managed to get back into the saddle with his burden and head on down the road toward Lobo Junction.

"This is going to be tough on Elena," he murmured. "Awful tough."

He looked down at the whiskery face against his chest. It was something of a shock to see Gil Evans in such a condition. He'd always been such a hardy old rooster, independent as they came and with a tongue as sharp as a coil of barbed wire. But some bushwhacker had certainly humbled him now.

The veined eyelids never fluttered during the anxious ride to Lobo Junction. Gil was still out cold as Tom put his horse across the hard surface of the main highway and rode on into the dusty yard of the old cabin camp. The sun was almost three hours high now, and its heat had stifled all movement. Not the slightest breeze stirred the dried leaves of the poplars down by the weathered cabins.

Elena came to the door of the lunchroom, a welcoming smile on her moist face. The sound of hoofs in the yard on Friday always meant that Tom Keats was down from his Cross K ranch for a visit. But the smile vanished as she watched him step carefully to the ground with her father in his arms.

"Tom, what happened?" She saw the wound on Gil's head and her eyes widened. "He finally drove that old bus off the road!"

"He's been shot, Elena," said Tom gently. "Show me where to put him."

She held open the screen door while he passed through, and then led the way to a rear bedroom which held the heat of an oven. Tom laid the old man on the bed and said, "Fetch a basin of water and some cloths." Then he went back to the lunchroom and cranked the wall phone until he raised the operator in Tucson. He managed two ragged connections and then went back to the bedroom. "I've called the doctor and reported to the sheriff," he said. "They'll be out presently."

"I suppose who ever did it was after the express pouch. Today is payday for the irrigation crew up at the Basin."

"How much was it, Elena?"

She changed the cloth on Gil's head before answering. "Nearly eight hundred dollars, I think. That's the usual amount."

"I didn't see the pouch in the car," he said.

"It was beside him on the seat when he left here." Elena Evans stood up to face him, a girl almost as tall as he, and there was an expression of hopelessness in her wide, blue eyes. "We're done here, Tom. We can't possibly make up the money."

"Whoever did it knew that today was pay day for the Basin outfit. Well, maybe this is a break for us, Elena. You know how I've begged you to leave this pit of hell and come to the Cross K."

"Don't talk about that now!" she cried. "Why—why you act as though you were glad it happened!"

She turned back to her father on the bed as the roar of a motor broke the pressing silence of Lobo Junction. Tom hurried out to the front. But it was only the morning stage from Tucson stopping at the shed garage across the highway. Sam Roope, the fat garageman, came out to fill the boiling radiator with water. Then the stage went on, leaving behind only a whirl of dust and the stench of burned oil.

Tom led his horse to the warped trough across the camp yard and then crossed the highway and entered the garage, the only other building at Lobo Junction. Sam Roope and his helper, Skip Ragan, were fussing about a long black car. Both men looked up as Tom entered and wiped sweat from grease-smudged features.

"Howdy, Keats," greeted Roope, his smile stained by tobacco juice.

Tom nodded, his eyes roaming the long black car before him. He brought them back to Roope. "Sam, has any car passed here this morning? I mean any car except the stage."

SAM ROOPE pursed his lips thoughtfully, and finally shook his head. He said to Ragan, "You notice any car, Skip?"

Skip Ragan consulted his memory and then shook his head. He was a small man, younger than Roope; his eyes seemed in a perpetual squint and his straw-colored hair was an unmanageable mess, stippled with old grease.

"Ain't much travel along here these days," he said, "Too danged hot."

"Expecting somebody?" inquired Roope.

"Just wondering," Tom replied. "Somebody stuck up Gil Evans this morning, two miles up the road."

"Wh-what?" gulped Roope. His jaw went slack.

Skip Ragan crowded closer. "What'd they get?" he asked.

"The express pouch. This is pay day up at the Basin."

"Did Gil recognize the gents?" asked Roope.

"We don't know that he even saw the robber—or robbers. He was shot."

"Judas! Is it bad? He alive?"

"He'll live I think," said Tom. "I just fetched him in."

Skip Ragan shook his head. "I ain't none surprised, Keats. The old coot was too dang careless with that pay money. Like as not," he added, "the bandit guy will never be caught, neither. Probably came back to the highway and headed for Tucson."

"Well, the sheriff has been notified. No doubt he knows of any suspicious characters in the country." Tom looked at the long black car again. "Where did this rig come from?" he asked.

"Belongs to a fella that drove in here yesterday afternoon. Got a leaky gasket and he was afraid to go on. Stayed over to let us fix it. I phoned in to Tucson to have a new gasket sent out on the stage. It didn't come."

Tom considered his information carefully for a time, then retraced his steps to the dusty yard. As he came to the sagging porch of the lunchroom he saw a stranger seated in one of the chairs, a lengthy man with dark features and grey eyes set a bit too close together. In spite of the heat the stranger sat there with his coat on. He was tracing little trails in the dust of the chair arm with a long finger as Tom came up the steps.

"Howdy," said Tom casually.

"Good morning, sir," came the reply. "It has the markings of a warm day."

"If it was any different in this country we'd die of shock," said Tom.

The dark man's lips spread in a mirthless smile. "Do you know if they've fixed my car yet over there?"

"Roope says the gasket didn't come in on the stage."

"Too bad. I'd like to get out of this place soon."

"I can understand that," said Tom and went on into the house.

Elena faced him from the edge of the bed. "Dad hasn't stirred, Tom. Why doesn't the doctor come?"

"He'll be here." He squatted down beside her and lowered his voice. "Who is that fella outside, seated there on the porch?"

"Probably Mr. Beeler. Tall and dark?"

"Yeah, and a tough-looking cooky if I ever saw one."

"Oh, he's been very nice, Tom. Begged to use one of the old cabins last night. His car broke down just as he got here in the afternoon."

"That could have been danged convenient," Tom mused. "Now he's in a hurry to get out of here."

"Well, who can blame him?" Her eyes steadied on Tom's thoughtful countenance. "Oh, you mean that—maybe he's the one—"

"Where was he this morning?" Tom broke in.

"In the cabin until breakfast time, so far as I know."

"How'd he look when he came in to eat? I mean was he dusty—anything like that?"

"No, I don't think so. As a matter of fact, I noticed that he'd taken the trouble to shave."

Tom stood up. "Well, maybe I'm just fooling with a wild notion," and went back out to the porch and sat down on the top step.

ADAM BEELER gazed at the back of the rancher's browned neck for a moment, then he said, "Holdups are rather unusual in this country, aren't they?" said Beeler after a pause.

"Yeah. Nothing much to steal."

"How long has Evans been running supplies up to the irrigation outfit?"

"Oh, about two years. He took it up when the tourist business went dead here."

They sat in silence until a few minutes later a car spun off the highway and came to a stop in the yard. The doctor got out with his black grip and the sheriff beckoned to Tom. "Show me the place, Keats," said the lawman.

Tom rode with him back to the place where the old car had been wrecked, passing on the meager information he had. The sheriff, plainly disgruntled at the call out into the heat, muttered something about Gil Evans' sheer cussedness and carelessness.

"For two years I've been warning the express people about the way Evans handled their stuff. Now this happens."

Tom had no argument for this, so he kept silent. Arriving at the scene of the holdup, the sheriff walked around the car and then squinted at the surrounding land. He left the car and began to prowl among the boulders beside the road.

Tom took this chance to examine the old car more closely, even getting down to look beneath it. His attention was drawn by the sheriff calling and he joined the man by a boulder some forty feet distant from the road.

"The bandit stood here, Keats. See the marks of his shoes? He wore flat heels, see?"

"The marks are plain," Tom agreed.

"Kind of a nervous gent—he stamped around considerable while waiting for Evans to arrive. Right?"

"Right," Tom nodded.

"So we got a flat-heeled robber on our hands. Know what that means? No local guy did the job."

"Not necessarily so," Tom checked.

The sheriff went on without heeding. "Here is where he headed back for the highway. Short, quick strides. He had the money. He'd almost bungled the job with his poor shooting—another sign he wasn't a desert man. Wanted to get back to where he left a car beside the highway."

"Don't see any fresh tire marks on the road," said Tom. "Still, its pretty hard-packed right here. If the bandit did have a car, he went back toward Tucson, as no car has passed eastward through Lobo Junction this morning."

"All right; I'll get back to town and check up on all suspicious characters. Have to move fast, get the news on the wire too. Let's go."

BACK in Lobo Junction Tom joined Elena and the doctor in the hot bedroom. Gil's head had been bandaged and there were several varieties of medicine on the lamp stand beside the bed. Gil's face was now dark with fever, but his breathing was easier.

"That's about all I can do now," said the doctor moving toward the door. "He'll

be unconscious for a few more hours. Nothing dangerous about the wound and the concussion isn't serious. Let me know how he is tomorrow morning."

When the sound of the departing car had died, Elena sank into a chair and smiled wearily up at Tom. "It's good to know that it isn't too serious."

"He'll come out of it all right," Tom agreed, "but then I suppose he'll go wild about the money."

"Tom, if we could just get that money back before he comes to, maybe—"

"Maybe this thing would serve as a clincher to make your Dad give up this business," he finished for her.

"If only it would," she murmured.

Tom knew that she was thinking of his Cross K ranch back in the hills. So often he'd told her of his place set there in the green meadow below the big draw. There the trees were green above a garden irrigated by a small stream. The heat there was not so oppressive, and there was quiet and peace, and an easier job for Gil Evans.

"I'll do my best," he told her and went out to march through the dust of the yard to the garage across the highway.

Adam Beeler's long, black car stood as before, with hood lifted and tools strewn along the running board. Sam Roope was drowsing in a corner, mouth sagging and perspiration leaking down his double chin. Tom roused him and said, "How long will it be before Beeler's car is ready?"

"Dunno, Keats. Mebbe the new gasket will come on the afternoon stage."

"Then, so long as you've got to wait, I'd like you to take your tow car and go up to the wreck. Load the supplies on your car and run 'em up to the irrigation crew."

"Okay," said Roope. "Shall I speak about the payroll or anything?"

"Just say that Gil Evans had a wreck, that's all. On your way back, hook into his car and tow it back here to the Junction. Leave it in the yard yonder."

"Why not let me fetch it here, Keats? It's got to be fixed and I'll give the old man time to pay for the job."

"Leave it yonder in the yard," Tom said again.

"Okay, okay," grunted Roope and waddled to the rear of the garage where his old tow car stood.

Skip Ragan appeared and asked, "Where's Sam going?"

"Up the Basin road to fetch in Gil's car."

Skip shaded his eyes to watch the tow car go rumbling up the rutted road. "Well, it'll give us another job to do, and Lord knows we need the work. Business here at the Junction is purty awful, Keats."

Retracing his steps Tom went back to Gil's bedroom and said to Elena, "I'll take over here now. You go rest for a while. There'll be supper to cook later on, you know."

Elena drew in a slow, weary breath. "I don't know what I'd do without you," she whispered.

"It's my aim to fix it so you won't ever have to do without me," he said.

HE SAT down in the chair beside the bed, sat so that he could look out through the bedroom door and through the lunchroom to the porch. Adam Beeler had disappeared and in the moments that followed nothing could be heard but the buzz of flies and the slow but steady breathing of Gil Evans. Tom sat there thinking until a new sound drew his attention to the old man on the bed. Gil's lips were moving.

Tom dipped a cloth into the basin of water and wet the old man's lips. The veined eyelids fluttered slightly, opened a crack and then closed again. Evans was trying to say something. Tom bent low to listen and heard one distinct word, "Eggs." That was all. After that Gil Evans sighed and lapsed into what Tom thought was slumber.

The afternoon dragged on in heavy heat and silence, until the Tucson stage rumbled in, halted for water and then roared on down the shimmering strip of highway. The sound brought Elena from her room and she asked, "How is he?"

"Sleeping now, Elena. His pulse is stronger and breathing easier. If you want to start supper, go ahead."

"There's never an end to hunger," she said and went to the kitchen.

Tom strolled to the front door of the lunchroom and saw Adam Beeler at the well. The tall, angular man drew a fresh bucket of water, drank from it and then turned to pat Gil's horse. After this he came to the porch and sat down in one of the sagging chairs, patting dust from his coat and trousers. This done to his taste, he lighted a cigar and sat relaxed, until Sam Roope came across the highway with Gil Evans' old car in tow. The garageman stopped midway between the porch and the well, unhooked his tow and turned about. Tom saw that Adam Beeler was now leaning forward in the chair, eyes fixed on the wrecked car.

Elena came in from the kitchen to wipe the dusty counter and saw Tom standing there by the screen door. The expression on his face made her ask, "What is it?"

He backed to the counter. "Sam Roope brought the car in, and Adam Beeler seems to be interested in it."

Little lines of worry creased her brow. "He seems so nice," she murmured.

"That pays, at times, Elena. I tell you he's a tough customer. Just the same, I'm puzzled about some things."

Elena scrubbed at some fly specks on the mustard jar. "For instance?"

"His long legs."

"Long legs?" she echoed. "But I don't see—"

"When the robber left the scene up yonder, heading toward the highway, he took short, quick steps. That would be hard for a man with long legs to do."

"Couldn't he have taken short steps on purpose, just to give the impression that a smaller man had done the job?"

"That's possible, of course. Wish I had taken time to measure the footprints. Now I'll just have to watch him, see if he goes out to look over the old car."

"But would he dare do that, Tom? And what reason would he have?"

"If he's the man there's reason enough."

"Riddles!" she cried, exasperated.

"Quiet," he cautioned. "He mustn't hear us talking about him."

"Then you do think it was Adam Beeler!"

"One thing I do know, He's more interested in Lobo Junction than a casual traveler would be."

TOM LINGERED near the front of the lunchroom. He saw a splinter of shadow creep eastward from the well and touch one of the old cabins, softening its weathered appearance. A faint movement of air stirred the dead leaves in the yard. And then, with a slow, gliding motion, Adam Beeler left the chair on the porch and walked toward Gil Evans' car. Watching the tall man, Tom tensed slightly, his eyes narrowing.

Beeler passed around the car, peering inside and at the holes in the windshield; then, with measured strides came back to the porch. He saw Tom just inside the screen door and said, "Kind of a mess, eh?"

Tom nodded and turned his attention to Sam Roope and Skip Ragan who were now crossing the highway, coming over for supper. He wondered if the garagemen ever washed before a meal, or at any time. They came up the steps and Beeler said, "Did the gasket come on the afternoon stage?"

"Yup," replied Roope. "We been work-

Easy on the Horse!

By LIMERICK LUKE

A lady dude out from Milwaukee
Complained that her pony was baukee.
They told her to quirt him,
But she cried, "That would hirt him!
I'd much rather climb off and waukee!"

ing on the car. Mebbe have it ready for you by midnight, if you're in a hurry."

"I'd appreciate it," said Beeler, coming through the door with them.

They straddled stools at the counter and waited. Tom went to the kitchen and said to Elena, "The buzzards are perched. Can I help?"

"I'll manage, Tom. You just sit up too."

He made the fourth silent man at the counter, but when Elena came in with the food, it seemed to loosen their tongues. They talked about the long spell of heat and speculated when it would break. Sam Roope had drowned his plate of beans with catsup and ate noisily. Skip Ragan dipped biscuit after biscuit into the saucer of half-melted butter on the counter.

"We ought to be hearin' somethin' from the sheriff," he said between bites.

"Aw, he'll never ketch that robber," grunted Roope. "The guy is too smart. He's a professional."

"I don't think so," said Tom flatly.

"Why not?" asked Beeler.

"Well, did you ever hear of a professional robber leaving the job without taking the money with him?"

"Do you mean to say that such a thing happened in this case, Keats?" he asked.

Tom swept the group a quick glance. "That's right," he said.

"Well, what do you know!" grunted Sam Roope. "I don't get it."

"A professional," said Tom carefully, "would shoot better than that." He pointed to the old car. "The robber was nervous, uncertain. He shot at least three times. He was afraid those shots might be heard, attract attention. He didn't want to be found with the money on him in case there was an immediate hunt for the shooter."

"So he hid the express pouch? You found it?" questioned Beeler softly.

"When I went back with the sheriff to show him the spot," continued Tom, "I took time to check the old car over to see if it could be hauled back here. I was underneath, looking at the steering gear, when I saw the express pouch. It was tied into a channel of the car frame."

Ragan said, "The guy was nuts."

Tom shook his head. "I thought it was kind of clever," he said. "He walked away from the scene and he didn't want to be caught carrying the express pouch. He knew the old car would be towed in sooner or later, so why not wait until then, when there'd be an opportunity to remove the express pouch and hide it quick?"

The four men had finished eating and they walked out to the porch, which was gilded with all the glory of a desert sunset. Tom glanced over his shoulder and saw Elena standing near the screen door. He wished that she would move back out of possible danger.

IT WAS Adam Beeler who broke the silence. "Hiding the express pouch under the car was clever," he said. "It could disprove your theory that the robber was not a professional. The pouch hadn't been opened?"

"It hadn't been opened then," Tom answered. "I left it as I found it."

"You did?" said Skip Ragan. "Why, I'd of thought that you—"

"Mr. Keats had an idea," broke in Adam Beeler. "He plans to watch the car and catch the robber when he comes here to remove the pouch."

"Oh," muttered Ragan.

"That's why I had you fetch the car here to the yard," said Tom to the perspiring Sam Roope. "I can watch it better here. And I'm sure going to enjoy that event for several reasons. That bandit is going to be mighty surprised and disappointed."

There was something definitely heavy about the silence that followed this statemen. Sam Roope mopped the back of his neck and spat again. With seeming reluctance Adam Beeler tossed his cigar to the ground where it glowed in the gathering shadows. Tom watched the man carefully, waiting for some faster move.

"All right, I'll ask it," said Beeler at last. "Why will the robber be so disappointed?"

"Because he'll find no money in that express pouch."

"Ah!" Beeler leaned forward in the chair. "You removed it?"

"No, I didn't. Somebody else got into the act. A party of the third part did that."

"When?" asked Skip Ragan.

"When he hoisted up the old car to tow it back here to Lobo Junction."

As he said this, Tom leaned slightly toward Adam Beeler, but with even this slight advantage he missed the man entirely. Beeler dived past him to strike Skip Ragan in the stomach.

Sam Roope had floundered down the steps and was now wabbling across the yard. Tom took after the fat man, knocked him to the dust and sat on him. Back on the porch Skip Ragan was shrieking curses at his erstwhile boss. Tom listened for a moment and then dragged his prisoner up and pushed him back toward the porch. Metal gleamed in the shadows and handcuffs snapped about the wrists of the garagemen.

Skip Ragan slobbered with rage as he glared at Roope. "You dirty double-crosser! I do the dirty work and you take the gravy. I was a chump to let you in on it."

"I didn't take it, Skip," blubbered Roope. "I never even looked at the pouch under the car. If there ain't no money in it, you took it when you left the road."

Adam Beeler smiled at Tom. "It's an old saw but it's true—that there's no honor among thieves."

Tom drew in a long breath. "And just who the hell are you?" he asked.

BEELER continued to smile. "Had you worried, eh? Well, I'm a special agent for the express people. I was sent here to check up on Gil Evans' method of handling the payroll. It seems that the sheriff in Tucson has complained about it several times."

Tom shook his head. "Well, you sure have had me bothered. I thought the car business was just a stall."

"You were right, Keats, but the idea was to keep Gil Evans from knowing why I was here. Sorry I kept you in a dither, my friend, but I saw that you were cooking up something and I wanted to sit by and enjoy it. I tried to play straight man for you this evening. You see, it's not often that a professional is privileged to watch local talent at work. You'd make a fine officer. Perhaps you'd better let me have that payroll money now."

Tom's eyes narrowed slightly. "I don't know as I'd let you have it even if I could lay my hands on it, Beeler."

"Admirable caution," said Beeler with a nod. "But why can't you lay your hands on it?"

"Because Sam Roope delivered it to the Basin crew this noon."

"What's that?" sharply.

"The payroll," said Tom evenly, "was cached in a case of eggs that Gil Evans was taking up to the Basin camp. I don't think he ever carried the money in that old express pouch."

"Humph! And they sent me here to check up on a careless old man!"

"Hope you enjoyed the experience," said Tom and went inside.

He found Elena seated on the bed holding one of her father's withered hands. Gil Evans lay there with eyes open; his lips parted as Tom entered and he said, "Good work, boy. You ketched 'em."

Tom knelt down beside Elena. "Tell me, Gil, was the money in that egg case?"

"Sure. I tried to tell you when my head was still fuzzy."

Tom wet his lips with relief. "Then I did have it figured right. And I've something else figured right, too. You're finished with Lobo Junction."

"That's what I just told him," spoke up Elena. "I told him that we were—were going to the Cross K ranch just as soon as he was able."

"Whether or no," added Tom. "You're going if I have to carry you there in my arms."

"You ain't carrying me nowhere, Tom Keats," said the old man. "Shucks, in a couple of days I'll be walking again. Or anyhow I'll be able to ride a hoss if you'll fetch one for me. It ain't so far to the Cross K." He finished with a grin and a wink, and Tom took the hint and slipped a dusty arm about Elena's waist.

She stood before them, hating them

ROSE ALVORD came into Queen City on the Saturday afternoon stage. She had dozed most of those long thirsty hours, but now that the town was just ahead she came awake and rubbed the sleep wrinkles from her eyes. The lank man seated across from her watched with a faint smile curving his wide mouth.

"You slept all the way up the grade from Weeping Woman Springs," he said. "I don't see how you managed it on a road as rough as this one."

She wondered a little wearily if this was the beginning of another man's advances.

No Gals in Nogales

By C. William Harrison

THE RINCON ROSE, men called her, and asked her for a kiss, but she had eyes for only two of them and offered not kisses but death

She said indifferently, "Get tired enough, and you can sleep any time and any place."

"I suppose." His smile deepened, and he regarded her with curious interest. "Nights and days must get all tangled up in your business."

She raised her eyes and looked at him steadily. This was what she hated most of all—the way men looked at her and instantly catalogued her profession. She had learned to stand almost anything during the past three years, but this unquestioning snap judgment by men she met was something that always rankled bitterly.

"What do you mean by that? What about my business?"

His smile didn't change. "No offense meant," he said quickly.

She couldn't figure him. His eyes were cool and grey, with something bold and almost rash glinting deep in them. But if there was anything suggestively personal in his voice she couldn't detect it.

He said calmly, "I saw you once when you played at the Bird Cage, over in Tombstone, Miss Alvord." His glance lowered for the briefest space of time, and she knew he was remembering the scanty costume she wore on the stage when she sang and danced. "Wouldn't be likely to forget you after seeing you once," he said. "You have a beautiful—voice." Color flushed his face, and he said quickly, "Never heard a girl sing prettier than you did that night, Miss Alvord."

She didn't thank him, because she knew his compliment hadn't been inspired entirely by her singing. He was like all the rest. Men paid to hear her sing and see her dance, and afterwards they imagined a hundred other things about her.

The stage rattled down the last grade of the canyon and into the town. Through the window she saw the miners and cattlemen thronging the street, and she heard the driver's long whoop as he skidded the stage to a stop in front of the Copperado Theater.

"It's the Rincón Rose, boys. Stand back and make room for the purtiest piece of femininity this side of old St. Louie. Rincón Rose, boys, and don't crowd the little gal."

A MINER, already half-drunk on the wages of a week's hard work in the copper mines, raised his voice in a wild howl. "I've got a hundred dollars in my pocket, little lady. A hundred dollars that I'll pay for a kiss from the Rincón Rose."

Rose faced the crowd boldly. She laughed coolly, and all this was an old routine with her. Men were all alike, and she hid her contempt behind a mocking laugh.

"What about the wife you left behind you, my friend? What about the promise you made her to be true?"

"A man ain't cheatin' when he pretends the other woman is his wife," the miner shouted. "How about that kiss, Rose?"

"After the show tonight," Rose said. "I'll take your money then, or what's left of it."

The tall man in the black coat and string tie pushed his way through the crowd, and she knew he would be Clint Travers. He stopped in front of her, and she felt the impact of his slow, humid glance. "I'm Clint Travers, Rose; I own the Copperado."

He grinned and winked. "The other girls in your show got here yesterday, but the boys wouldn't be satisfied until they saw you." He half turned and waved a gambler's slim hand at the cotton bunting draped across the Copperado.

No gals left in Nogales!
They're all in Queen City for your pleasure and entertainment!
See them—at the Copperado!

Rose turned her glance back to Clint Travers, but he was watching the lank stranger climb out of the stage. She saw a look of strain flicker through his eyes, which dropped quickly out of sight. He swung back to her, grinning again.

"I'll show you to your room," he said.

She nodded, and as he led her into the Copperado she glanced over her shoulder. The lank man was standing beside the stage, tall and straight. He was looking at Clint Travers, with the palm of one hand absently rubbing the butt of his gun.

The Copperado was a combination theater, saloon and gambling parlor. It was cool inside, with a shadowy quietness that would change when night finally brought the week-end's revelry to a peak.

The smell of whiskey and cigar smoke laced the air thinly, and at the far end of the long room Rose could see the stage with its drawn curtain and the footlights waiting to be lighted. At one side, two men were idly dealing out poker hands, and as they looked up the shock of recognition was like a cold hand laid across Rose's stomach.

BURL RHYS and Al Mitchell! She had never seen them before, and yet she would have known them anywhere. And she thought, it's been three years, Nora, but I've finally found them.

Clint Travers touched her arm, and said in his cold, drawl-edged voice. "Excuse me a minute, Rose. I've got some business to attend to."

She nodded absently. He went across the room to the poker table and spoke to the two men. Something sharpened in their faces, and the small one—Al Mitchell—swore a harsh oath that reached Rose's ears.

Burl Rhys shoved his chair back, pushed to his feet with a smooth, fluid swiftness of movement. He wheeled, tramped across to a window, and glanced through it guardedly. He swung back around and returned to the table, his craggy face rock-hard.

"It's him, all right."

Clint Travers said something, and Al Mitchell swore again, harshly. "To hell with all that. I know how to handle this."

Rose saw the narrow, speculative glance that passed between Burl Rhys and Clint Travers. Rhys gave the briefest of nods, and Rose watched Travers pick up the thought that had traveled to him from Rhys.

Travers said thinly, "Don't be a fool, Al. You ain't that good."

"The hell I ain't good enough!" Mitchell said harshly. "The man never was born that could beat me."

He stared hotly at Rhys and Travers, then spun on his heel, and stalked out of the room. Rose saw it all across the wings of the saloon doors. She saw Al Mitchell prowl out into the street, and she saw the tall stranger catch sight of him. The stranger put down the sacked saddle he had been shouldering, and turned slowly to face Mitchell.

Some miner smelled trouble and shouted a warning. "What's up! Hey, you two—what's wrong here!"

Al Mitchell halted his prowling advance. He balanced himself, a small, thin man with tight eyes and a bleak malice of expression. His lowslung gun jutted just below his hand, and his fingers slowly spread. He was sure of himself, as all killers are sure.

He called loudly through the sudden fall of silence. "You've come to the wrong town, Kennard. We don't want card-cheating killers around here."

The tall man, Kennard, bent his head slightly at Al Mitchell's voice. He smiled slowly, and then he stopped smiling.

"You're cutting a deep hole under you, Mitchell," he said softly.

Mitchell's grin was bone-dry, mirthless. "It's for you, Kennard. It's big enough for you to fill."

"Maybe," Kennard breathed, and his eyes narrowed attentively on Mitchell.

It was Al Mitchell who made the first move, and it came as Rose had somehow expected. He uttered a short, brittle laugh—and reached for his gun. His hand dipped and raised with a curving blur of speed, and his shot punched out a sharp echo to Kennard's.

The lank man, Kennard, had not pulled his gun—Rose saw that now. He had fired through the open throat of a swiveled holster, and his bullet kicked a thin gout of dust from Al Mitchell's shirt.

Rose saw all this as a single, sharply etched picture—the black spurts of smoke, the slamming impact of the bullet and the shocked agony that crashed into his narrow face. Mitchell dragged a clawing hand across his chest, and that convulsive movement tore his shirt open as his body curved around and fell. Then the horror of this violence struck Rose, and she closed her eyes tightly against it.

She heard Burl Rhys' dispassionate grumble. "Didn't think Al could do it. Al never did have what it takes to beat a man as mean as Lee Kennard is with a gun. Makes this kind of tough to figure, Clint."

CLINT TRAVERS came across the room and touched Rose's arm. "Sorry you had to see that, Miss Alvord."

She opened her eyes and looked at him. He turned her away from the door, and his smile cut none of the bleak hardness out of his eyes.

"Do you know that fellow out there—Lee Kennard?"

She shook her head at Travers' question. "He came in on the same stage with me, but I never saw him before."

Travers' smile flattened out and gave a brutal slant to his mouth. "Lee Kennard is a card cheat and a killer. We had trouble with him once in Bisbee, and had him sent to prison after a shooting over there. He's back now, and he's out to get us. You saw what he did to Al Mitchell."

Rose said nothing. She was thinking, the fourth man, Mike Tandy, was killed two years ago in Bisbee. And she wondered if this Lee Kennard had done that shooting. She had no way of knowing.

Clint Travers was speaking in his cold, bitten drawl. "You could help us in this, Miss Alvord. A woman like you could do just what we need to have done to handle Kennard."

She looked at him steadily. "A woman like me?"

His laugh carried a shallow vein of mirth. "From what I've heard, you've hit every mining cowtown this side of El Paso. You've got what it takes to interest a man, and you know how to use it." His eyes drifted over her, and he grinned. "Kennard is tough and cagey, but you've got what it takes to handle him. You wouldn't have any trouble getting him to your room tonight after the show."

She gave him the kind of smile she knew he expected. It was thin and hard and calculating.

He fingered into his vest pocket, took out a small white pill. "I reckon it wouldn't be the first time you slipped a pill like this into a man's drink," he said. "An old trick for a woman in your business."

Contempt and anger came up through her, and she pushed it grimly back. She said evenly, "What's in this for me?"

"He'll have a roll on him. Whatever you get is yours."

She shook her head, and her eyes were hard. "But if he's broke, I get nothing. No dice, Travers. I don't operate that way."

He laughed softly. "I'll guarantee you five hundred for the job."

"The only guarantee I believe is money in my hand," she answered coldly. "You seem to know a lot about—about women like me. The deal calls for cash, Travers."

Temper ruffled the hard surface of his eyes, and then he grinned. "I like the way you work, Rose. I like it fine." He took the money out of his wallet, handed it to her. She rolled the pill into the corner of her handkerchief, and carefully knotted it.

His eyes turned humid as he watched her, and he bent closer to her. "Maybe I'll be seeing you after Kennard is out of the way."

"Maybe," Rose said. "Maybe."

THE COPPERADO came to life after the sun had gone down. Miners and cowmen came crowding into the place to line the long bar and fill the gambling tables. Through the closed door of her room, Rose could hear the rising clamor as she dressed. She remembered the feeling of shame that had swept through her the first time she had put on her scanty costume. That was nearly three years ago, after her sister had been killed in that raid on the Twin City stage, and the feeling of shame was still in her as she looked at herself in the long mirror.

Someone rapped on her door. "Time for the show, Rose." That brassy voice would be Della McCaslin, who was always eager for the show and the work that followed it.

Rose shuddered. "All right."

She added a little more paint to her lips, and tucked a lock of hair into place. Downstairs, she took her place in the line of

girls, and then the piano struck into the first number.

It was always the same, the hard, speculative glances of the men, the whispers and drink-thickened shouts, the drifting ribbons of smoke and the rancid smell of whiskey. She danced with the inviting smile that this work called for, and she sang with the brassy boldness of tone that these men expected. When the last number was over, they filed down to the main floor, and the girls began circulating.

A man grabbed at her, and Rose forced a teasing laugh and pushed him away. Another swayed up to her, made bold by too much drinking.

"I'm lonesome, little girl."

Rose gave him a slow, provocative smile. "Have another drink, then, and think about your wife."

"Ah, but she was never like the Rincón Rose. Let me buy you a drink, honey, and we'll talk!"

Rose ducked under his arm, and moved on. She found Lee Kennard at one of the tables on the edge of the room. She felt the quick strike of his glance, and wondered what he had decided about her. His eyes told her nothing, cool, grey, and guarded.

She smiled at him. "Lonesome?"

He grinned faintly. "Not particularly."

"An honest man," she said, and laughed softly. She pulled a chair around, and sat down.

He watched her quietly, with his smile fading and only a thin trace of amusement lingering in his eyes.

He said slowly, "The fellow you ducked over there has been flashing a mighty handsome roll. You missed a good bet there."

SHE SAT close to the table, for some unaccountable reason suddenly shamed more than ever before by the scanty costume she wore.

"I'm broke," he told her. "I'm poor pickings for a girl like you."

She raised her head a little, watching him with a shadowy trace of resentment. "That's twice you've said that. What do you mean—a girl like me?"

His grin became more pronounced. "That's twice you've got a little sore when I said that. You wouldn't get sore if you weren't straight." His grin tightened a little. "I think you've got a good reason for doing this kind of work. It ain't for the money you could get from a man."

She watched him steadily. "No?"

He shook his head, and his smile faded. Something changed in his eyes, a memory coming back to him. "You look a lot like another girl I saw once. Maybe I wouldn't have remembered her if she hadn't been killed by a gang of outlaws. She'd just been married, and her name was Mrs. Nora Conner. You remind me a lot of that girl, for some reason."

Rose said, "Buy me a drink, Mr. Kennard. Buy one for me and one for you."

His eyes suddenly sharpened and turned wary. He stared at her a moment, but he asked no questions. He nodded shortly, and ordered the drinks.

Burl Rhys had joined Clint Travers at the bar, and they were watching her narrowly. Rose gave Lee Kennard a bold, teasing smile, and moved her chair closer to him. He was frowning now, on edge and alert. She kept smiling as she pushed her fingers into his chair.

"Nora was my sister," she said.

It was hard for her to hold that teasing smile on her lips, but Rhys and Travers were watching and she had to keep pretending.

"You must be the man who drove the stage, Mr. Kennard. You've been hunting those outlaws ever since that robbery and murder, just as I have. Rhys and Travers are out to get you tonight."

She leaned close and brushed her lips across his cheek; she slipped her arm around him and pulled him closer to him. She had the small white pill in her hand, and she moved her hand across the rim of his whiskey glass. She dropped the tablet; Travers saw her, and nodded faintly.

She pulled Lee Kennard's face around, laughed softly. But against this she said, "Take your drink, but don't swallow it. Hold it in your mouth until you get to my room. They want me to take you up there."

She suppressed a shudder as she downed

the whiskey in her glass. Kennard tilted the glass to his lips, draining it. They stood up, and now fright was hammering her heart against the walls of her chest. They threaded their way between the tables, started up the stairs, and some man called out mockingly at her.

"Hey, Rose. Why him—why that one?"

THEY turned off the upper stair landing, walking close together, and Rose opened the door of her room. They went inside, and Rose leaned back weakly against the door, closing it.

He moved rapidly after that, a tall bone-and-muscle man who knew what he was up against. He opened a window, spat out the whiskey, and rinsed his mouth out with water. His mouth was hard, and long remembered hatred was bleak in his eyes.

"They didn't have to kill that girl," he said. His voice was softly harsh, bleak and bitter. "They shot me and thought I was dead. But I saw them, I saw it all. They dragged your sister out of the stage, and they. . . . I saw what they did, and I swore I'd kill them."

Rose closed her eyes, remembering her sister and what had happened that day at the stage; she knew.

Kennard said grimly, "I caught up with them two years ago in Bisbee. I killed Mike Tandy there, but the rest of the gang, Rhys, Mitchell, and Travers, made it look like murder. When I got out of prison, I started hunting them again. I'll finish it tonight."

Rose opened her eyes. "Nora was my sister. It's my place to do this."

Kennard shook his head. "You've gone through enough to track them down. You weren't there that day; you didn't see what I saw. This is my job—Rhys and Travers are mine."

They waited, letting silence take over the room. After a while, Kennard said softly, "Time enough now. You go out and send them here."

Rose stood there at the door for a moment, looking at the tall man in the dark clothes. He grinned faintly at her, and nodded, and she slowly smiled.

"Thank you, Lee Kennard."

She opened the door then, and stepped out of the room. She went to the balcony rail, and she could see Rhys and Clint Travers down there waiting for her signal. She nodded to them, and they came up the stairs. She watched them bitterly.

She wanted them to know. Whatever happened in that small room, whatever happened to her afterwards, she wanted them to know first. She stood between them and the door, straight and stiff, hating them with her eyes and the tone of her voice.

"The girl in the stage was my sister," she said. She watched the startled light that flared in the eyes of the two men. "I've spent three years working the dancehalls and saloons hunting for you. I wanted you both to know, because you're going to pay for what you did that day at the stage."

Clint Travers drew in a quick, sliding breath. Burl Rhys said sharply, "Kennard talked."

Then Clint Travers laughed cruelly. "But not until after he'd drunk the stuff. He's knocked out in there, and he'll handle easy. We'll take care of the girl later."

He slashed his hand across Rose's mouth, and she fell away from the door. They jerked the door open, and went inside, in a swift striking lunge, with their guns out.

Someone swore sharply. Rose heard that, and she heard the instant roar of a shot. A man screamed, and another shot crashed with a heavy impact of violence. The wall of the room shook as someone fell against it, and the brutal beating of the shots abruptly died out. Silence rushed in, and through it came a man's slow sobbing.

She saw Lee Kennard then. He came through the doorway with the shock of that violent moment still sealing all expression behind the hard planes of his face.

She went to him, and she felt his arms go around her, neither loosely or tightly. She was smiling now, and she was crying at the same time, and she watched the tension slowly drain out of his face. They stood there like that for quite a long time, silently looking at each other.

BONANZA

THE STORY SO FAR:

Dead broke, JIM TEAGUE gets an offer from RUPE CALDWELL to help protect the latter's mining interests in Bonanza Gulch. When he gets there he finds the whole town hates Rupe for his ruthless methods.

The miners blame Rupe's men for the holdups of gold going out of town, for the knifing of DUFF SHERRILL and the murder of other men who had criticized him.

Jim finds himself hated, too. Sherrill's daughter, JANET, was at first grateful to Jim for protecting her from the insulting advances of a couple of Rupe's gunmen, but now she turns to LES JARDEEN for companionship.

At first Jim feels his only stake in the fight is the high wage Rupe Caldwell pays him. Later he finds that Caldwell's man, GEORGE IDES, carries a rare Russian model .44, apparently the same gun that killed a stagecoach guard, and wonders if Rupe is as innocent of murder and double-dealing as he claims to be.

PART TWO

JIM TEAGUE came back up town from the diggings under a sky spangled with chill, crystal-sharp stars. He had just seen to the placing of the first guard shift. Curly Bolan was not there, but Rupe Caldwell had sent another man, named Moulton, to take Bolan's place. And Jack Case, as before, was in charge of the shift.

There was a light gleaming ruddily in the Sherrill cabin and Teague, as he passed, almost unconsciously angled closer to the place. He stopped abruptly, however, as movement came past a front corner of the cabin, movement that resolved itself into two people, walking arm in arm.

They came just a little way, then walked back the same way they had come. Two people, sauntering under the stars. Teague heard their voices, identified them. Janet Sherrill and Les Jardeen.

Teague melted away into the dark, his eyes going somber. He ended up at the Big Nugget, idling through the crowd in the place. He thought, a trifle cynically, of the vagaries of human nature. From what he had seen and heard since coming to Bonanza Gulch, the majority of the miners had little use for Rupe Caldwell. Yet they crowded the Big Nugget, which Caldwell owned, spent their dust across the bar, lost it across the poker tables and at the faro layout. They squandered it on the dance-hall girls, and Caldwell grew richer by the minute.

Teague saw that Ad Forsythe, the tin-

GULCH

By L. P. HOLMES

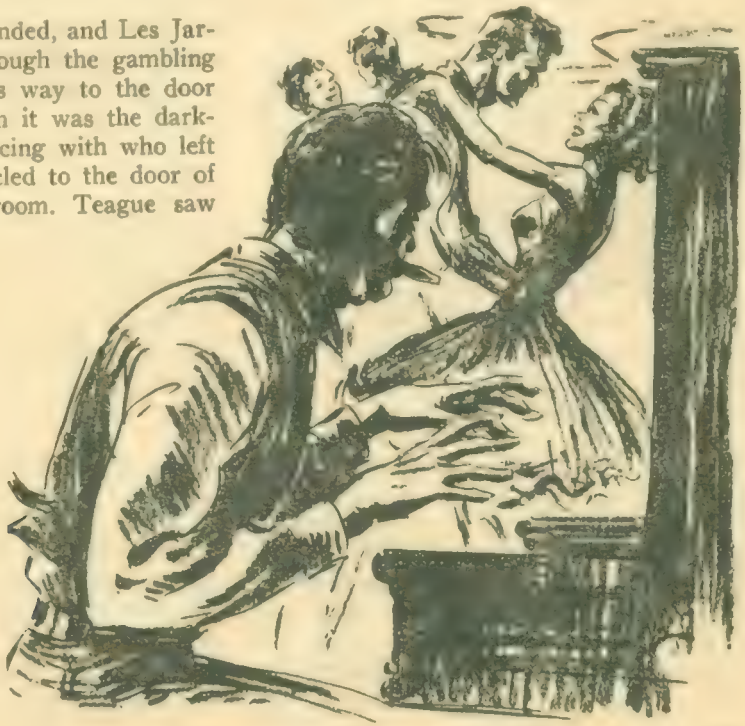
horn, was dealing at the faro layout again, with George Ides again the lookout. Teague took a chair against a wall, lighted a cigar and settled back to kill the evening until midnight, when it would be time for him to go on guard shift at Discovery.

Les Jardeen came in, had a drink at the bar, drifted from one gambling table to another to watch the play going on, finally ending up at the rear of the place where the piano was beating out rhythm and the dancers were swirling. He did not see Jim Teague, back against that shadowy wall.

Presently, into the beat of the music came those occasional jangling discords and Teague, swinging his head, saw that Les Jardeen was dancing again with that slim, dark-eyed girl. And the ugly little man at the piano would twist his head and watch them every time they circled past, his eyes glittering.

Presently the dance ended, and Les Jardeen came back up through the gambling space again, worked his way to the door and left the place. Then it was the dark-eyed girl he'd been dancing with who left the dance floor and circled to the door of Rupe Caldwell's side room. Teague saw her knock, then go in. Within a minute or two she came out and went back to the dance floor. On the way she paused momentarily at the faro layout, close to George Ides. She must have said something to him, for Ides glanced at her, nodded. Shortly after, Ides slid down from the high lookout's stool, stepped over to a poker table and tapped another house man on the shoulder. The house man tossed in his poker hand and took over the faro lookout's stool. Ides then went into Caldwell's side room.

Jim Teague felt suspicion stir in him, but then he shook himself angrily. He knew he could easily attach too much significance to what he'd seen because of the resentment he felt toward Jardeen, who had walked under the stars with Janet Sherrill,



The ugly pianist watched the couple, his eyes glittering

and then come to see one of the dancehall girls.

Teague got up, shouldered his way out into the night, headed toward the diggings, even though he was not due there to take over for a couple of hours. But a vast restlessness was upon him. He had a feeling he was getting mixed up in a vicious, murderous business, that would be harder every day to get out of.

There was a light still burning in the Sherrill cabin and in sudden decision Teague went over to the door of it and knocked. A murmur of voices inside quieted, and then it was Janet Sherrill who opened the door. The light from within fell fully on Teague, and he heard the girl catch her breath slightly. She stiffened and said, "There must be some mistake. Aren't you calling at the wrong place?"

"No mistake," said Teague quietly. "I want to talk to you and your father. I hope you are alone."

"Who is it, child?" came Duff Sherrill's voice. "And what does he want?"

The girl hesitated slightly. "It—it's Mr. Teague. And he says he wants to have a talk with you and me, Dad."

"Teague! Why, isn't he one of Rupe Caldwell's right-hand men? Tell him to be off. No Caldwell man comes into this cabin. The gall of him!"

Janet Sherrill started to close the door. "You see," she said quietly. "He feels very strongly—"

"No!" Teague put out a hand, pushed the door back, gently but definitely. He stepped into the cabin, swung the door closed behind him. "No!" he said again. "You got to listen to me."

He heard a gun lock click and he looked across into the muzzle of the revolver which Duff Sherrill held steady and menacing. The grizzled miner growled, "Get out! I'll shoot you dead if you don't. I want no Caldwell spy prowling in my cabin. Get out, I say!"

Jim Teague folded his arms, met the menace of the gun without flinching. "I'll leave when I've said what I came to say. It will pay you to listen. I want to warn you about—"

DUFF SHERRILL made a little stabbing motion with the gun, but the girl cried softly, "Wait—Dad! It won't cost anything to hear him out!"

Duff Sherrill's gun lowered, but only slightly. "I can think of nothing a Caldwell man can tell me that interests me. But—just as you say, Janet."

She faced Teague, very erect, looking at him with accusing eyes. "You understand that I share my father's sentiments fully. But for the sake of a kindness or two that you have done me—well, we're listening."

Teague inclined his head gravely. "You brought an injunction in with you from Alpine, calling on Rupe Caldwell to cease all work on a disputed claim until the proper title to that claim can be settled by court authority. Isn't that right?"

It was plain that both of the Sherrills were startled by Teague's information. "I—I don't know how you could have learned of that," stammered the girl. "But what about it?"

"To mean anything, it must be served by some accepted representative of the law. In this case, who would that be?"

"Why, Sheriff Riker, of course. I intend to give it to him in the morning and tell him to serve it."

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you, Miss Sherrill."

Duff Sherrill's growl rang through the cabin. "What is that, a threat?"

"No. Just well meant advice."

"Advice from a Caldwell man," scoffed Sherrill. "So that Rupe Caldwell could have more time to strip my claim with his damn sluice boxes. You must take me for the biggest fool unhung."

"You'll be a fool if you let Riker get his hands on that injunction," said Teague levelly. "For he'd never serve it, and you'd probably never see it again."

"He'll serve it," declared Duff Sherrill. "He'll have to. He's got no other out. So now you can go back to your boss, Mister Rupe Caldwell, and tell him he'll have to think up a better scheme."

Teague turned to the girl. "Miss Sherrill, I hope I've shown you I've your welfare at heart. Believe me, that is true.

Won't you try and convince your father?"

There was a barrier in her eyes that had not been there in the first day or two of their acquaintance. "Now that I know you're a Rupe Caldwell man, there's nothing more to be said."

Teague shrugged and turned away. "Very well. Sorry I bothered you."

The door closed behind him, and he moved away into the dark. His first bleak anger faded in front of reasoning. He couldn't blame the Sherrills for throwing his well meant advice back in his teeth. After all, he was a Caldwell man and they had every reason to distrust and despise him.

Just how much of a Caldwell man was he? He owed it to Rupe Caldwell that he was well dressed and fed, that he had a warm, dry bunk to sleep in at night, that he had money in his pocket. He had a job. These things he could thank Caldwell for. But what else?

Well, there was the open animosity and suspicion of every decent miner in this camp. Where once there had been a soft and friendly light in the eyes of Janet Sherrill when she looked at him, now there was a barrier, blank and unyielding.

AT MIDNIGHT Jack Case and his crew of Moulton, Bully Girard and Hamper went off shift. Case reported all quiet. So then Jim Teague and his group of Tappan, Sharpe and Burge took over. At his post Teague squatted on his heels, coat collar turned up against the night chill. Looking up at town, he saw that it was mostly darkened. A faint reflection of light hung about the Big Nugget, and when a small, biting wind came drifting down from the black mass of the Shawmuts it carried on it now and then the faint tamping of the piano. But finally all light was gone and the night lay utterly still except for the steady washing gurgle of the creek waters and the far off lonely mourning of a timber wolf prowling a deer trail in the Shawmuts.

A full hour drifted by, and then, off to his left, Teague heard Burge call a harsh challenge. Teague was instantly on his feet, staring through the blackness, then moving swiftly toward Burge. He sent a low call ahead of him and Burge answered.

"What was it?" asked Teague as he came up.

"Boots shuffling on gravel," Burge told him. "Yonder, toward the head of the sluice box."

"Maybe some miners, late from town, heading for their tents on their claims," suggested Teague.

"Maybe," Burge growled. "There was more than one. Sounded like a bunch of them."

"We'll take a look," said Teague, leading the way.

They worked along the sluice box, one on either side, alert senses probing the night, stopping every little way to listen. Water had been cut off from the box at the end of the day's sluicing—now there was only an occasional drip from some soaked seam. The box was like some gigantic snake, running away into the dark.

"All quiet now," said Burge. "But I'm sure I heard somebody moving."

They turned to retrace their steps, and it was at this moment that up out of the black shadow beside the sluice box a figure leaped and drove smashing into Jim Teague. A swinging blow with some kind of club barely missed Teague's head, but thudded down on his right shoulder, partially numbing it and his arm. A yell lifted, shrill and penetrating. Men seemed to explode from all sides in the dark and closed with a rush.

The blow on the shoulder made his right hand clumsy and aimless, unable to pull his gun. Teague did what he could with his left arm. He lashed out with a clenched fist, felt his knuckles bite against flesh and saw one figure fall away from him. Instantly others were upon him, clawing, smashing, kicking. By sheer force of numbers they carried him back and down and then there were boots upon him.

ONLY the dark and the fact that the attackers got in each other's way saved Teague from being kicked and stamped to a pulp. Partially gathering him-

self, he flung himself into the tangle of boots, tripped up a pile of bodies into a cursing, scrambling heap. When these untangled and struggled to their feet again, Teague had stumbled erect, too. Now, in the dark, the attackers were momentarily uncertain and Teague gained a little respite.

They did not get him down again, but the sheer weight of them drove him back and back. Again their own press of numbers saved him from serious injury, for any of them swinging a club in that tangle would have run as big a chance of braining one of their own group as they would of hitting Teague.

But Teague took the mauling blows of fists and got some back. A man cursed in thick rage after Teague's left fist had crashed into his mouth. Heavy boots, kicking out, thudded against Teague's legs. A hard, booming voice yelled orders from some other spot along the claim. Now came a pounding and crashing, the sound of boards splintering. And Teague knew that the raiders were tearing Rupe Caldwell's sluice boxes to pieces.

There was nothing he could do about it. He was still fighting for his life, still being driven back and back and only keeping his feet by sheer, cold tenacity. Under his stumbling feet the gravel bar dropped in a sudden, sharp pitch behind him. This change in level threw him off-balance just as another kick landed on his legs. He fell, backwards—and the icy flood of the creek caught him and whirled him away!

He realized instantly that here might be the chance for escape. He made no effort to struggle in the icy waters or to splash his way out. He caught a deep, shuddering breath and held it, letting the rushing waters have their way with him, carrying him away into the night.

For a distance the attackers ran along the edge of the creek. Clubs and boulders splashed close beside Teague, but none hit him, and the sweep of the waters gained him distance all the time. The main drive of the current swept toward the far bank, carrying Teague that way. Teague moved only enough to keep his face above water, catching another breath every now and then. Several times the driving current slammed him against partly submerged boulders, then carried him on once more.

The sound and movement of pursuit along the creek bank faded. A voice yelled triumphantly, "That one's done for. He was about finished when he went in. That snow water will finish the job!"

Jim Teague realized that this might well be true, for the icy chill was biting deeper and deeper until it seemed that his very heart must freeze. He rolled over on his stomach and began to swim with the current. His left arm was sound enough, but his right was still slow and clumsy from that first savage clubbing of his shoulder.

With the drive of the current to aid him, he traveled fast. The tumult up stream grew fainter and fainter. Teague began fighting by angling way across the current, found shallowing water, clawed and lurched his way up onto the bank, where he lay, panting and shaking.

COLD as the water had been, it seemed even colder to be out of it, the night chill striking bitterly through the sodden clamminess of Teague's clothes. His teeth began to chatter, and shudder after shudder of beaten misery swept over him. He had to be up, he had to get moving....

He had to try twice desperately before he could get to his feet and stay there. Even so he staggered and stumbled as he began moving off.

The first hundred yards were the hardest. Then Teague began getting back a portion of strength and balance. He broke into a shuffling run to get his blood to moving again. Another hundred yards of this and the numbness of chill began to fade a little. From then on he moved more freely and with surer step. He knew where he had to go and what he had to have. Rupe Caldwell's cabin and a roaring fire.

Teague circled getting into town. The cabin was dark and Teague thought he would find Caldwell there. But when, with shaking fingers, he got the lamp lit, he saw that the place was empty. He shoved fat pine kindling into the stove, got it flam-

ing. Then, as the first sucking roar of the draft began, he stripped to the skin, went at his bare and aching flesh with a rough towel. He knew that Caldwell kept a bottle under the head of his bunk and he took a deep drag at this. He wrapped a blanket about himself and hovered over the stove, now beginning to creak with heat.

The lamplight showed him that he was a mass of bruises. His right shoulder was no longer numb, but had stiffened up until he could barely raise his arm. The bruise where that club had landed was wicked indeed.

Steps came outside the cabin, and Sharpe and Tappan stumbled in. Both were beaten and bruised and bloody, staggering with exhaustion. Jim Teague laced two cups of coffee heavily from Caldwell's bottle, and the two men gulped the drinks thankfully.

"Burge?" asked Teague. "What about him?"

Sharpe shrugged. "Dunno," he mumbled. "Never heard or saw nothin' of him. Didn't have time. Seemed like there was a hundred lit all over Tom and me. Dunno yet how we got out of it with our skins. Never had a show to throw a gun or anything, but it wouldn't have done no good if we had. Wonder what Caldwell will say?"

"Who gives a damn?" blurted Tappan. "We did the best we could. Who could have done more? I could stand another cup of that stuff, Teague."

After Sharpe and Tappan had rested and recovered somewhat, Teague said, "You fellows might as well go and turn in. There's nothing we can do about things until daylight. I'll take the blame for everything. I was in charge."

Grey daylight was seeping in through the window by the time Teague's clothes were fully dry. He dressed, got together a bite of breakfast and was just finishing this when Rupe Caldwell came stamping in. Caldwell's eyes were bloodshot from sleeplessness and there was a strange surliness about him.

"Heavy poker game in the back room of the Big Nugget," he explained harshly. "And my luck was stinking. Sa-ay! Didn't you come off shift kind of early? It's barely daylight."

"Came off shift about an hour after midnight," said Teague quietly. "Got thrown off."

"What!"

"A swarm of them hit us without warning. We never had a chance. There must have been ten to one against us. Tappan, Sharpe and me managed to get out alive. Burge, I don't know. I was just going down to find out about Burge. By the sound of things they took axes to your sluice boxes, Rupe."

IT SEEMED to take Caldwell a moment or two to get the full implication. Then his lips pulled thin and a blaze of anger flamed in his eyes. "Is that what I hired you for, to let my sluices be raided? I thought you were a fighting man, Teague. Why damn it, there were probably several thousand dollars worth of dust against the riffles in those sluice boxes. I intended to clean up this afternoon. I suppose they robbed my sluices before smashing them up?"

"I wouldn't know about that," said Teague grimly. "About that time I was too busy keeping my head from being clubbed in to get what else was going on. I'm sorry about the whole thing, but I tell you, we never had a chance."

"Chance, hell!" snarled Caldwell. "As a fightin' man you should have made your own chances. What do you carry that gun for, pleasure? The whole thing is, Teague, you haven't got the salt necessary for this job, and you're full of a lot of weak-spined sympathy for every blundering fool miner and any snooty piece of dress goods who comes along. You—"

"I'd go a little easy if I were you, Rupe," Teague broke in. The cold storminess was in his eyes, his face pulled to lines of harshness. "You're sore because you took a whipping at poker, it seems. You got a right to be smoked up over that raid on your sluices. Just the same, watch your tongue. Better get some sleep and cool off before you say any more."

"I'll have my say right here and now,"

Caldwell rasped. "When I trust a man and pay him fat wages I expect results, not excuses. I can see now that you never did have the right slant on this deal. You've tried to tell me what I can do and what I can't do. You've pushed some of my boys around, like George Ides and Curly Bolan. Why you hit this town a down-and-out bum, without even eating money in your jeans. I gave you a break and now you pull this stuff on me. Well, you're done, Teague. Get out of this camp and keep going. You'll do that or—"

"Or what?"

"Or you'll stay here for good."

Jim Teague laughed. "So this is where the trail splits. I'm glad. I feel cleaner, somehow. I won't have to look slant-eyed at myself. Yes, you staked me, but I don't feel I owe you a thing. Because you never gave me the full picture. You covered up, lied to me. You made big smooth talk to justify all the dirty work you and your crowd have been pulling. So you're going to run me out of town, are you? Rupe, that will take some doing!"

Caldwell cursed thickly. "Get out of this cabin! Go sleep in the mud where you'd have had to if I hadn't taken you in. And get the hell out of town if you want to go on living."

"Tough talk, Rupe," drawled Teague coolly. "Care to back it up—now?"

For a moment Teague thought Caldwell would try, for Caldwell's face was convulsed with a sudden hate, and he rocked up on his toes like something ready to spring, but then a veiled look came into his eyes and Teague knew Caldwell couldn't fight any more. He could only scheme.

"You've slipped, Rupe," he taunted. "You don't walk any more. You creep. Where's the big, big man now, Rupe?"

"Get out!" raged Caldwell hoarsely. "Get out!"

Teague moved to the door. "Your luck's gone, Rupe. You better travel while the going is good. Because you've made an issue of this between you and me. Well, the clean outside air will smell good."

Jim Teague opened the door and backed through it.

BONANZA GULCH boiled with the news of the night raid on Rupe Caldwell's sluice boxes. Miners met, talked about it, grinned their satisfaction. Idling about town, Jim Teague heard some talk, as miners gloated openly. The talk pointed to the fact that Barney Foxx had led the raid. Down on the claims saws were whining and hammers rattling again, as Caldwell had his crew at work, repairing what they could, rebuilding what they must. And stacked with the workers' tools were rifles, loaded and ready.

Teague spent considerable time about the trading post, where he bought a new hat, having lost his old one in the icy creek the night before. As he squatted on his heels against the side of the trading post, letting the morning sun bake the stiffness out of his clubbed shoulder, his thoughts were bleak. There was little ahead of him, here in Bonanza Gulch. He had broken with Rupe Caldwell, and he was damned in the eyes of the miners and honest citizens.

From where he sat he could look down across the camp to the Sherrill cabin. Twice he glimpsed Janet Sherrill, once when she came out to throw away a pan of dishwater, again when she emerged to sweep the cabin step. Simple acts of everyday, commonplace housekeeping duties, yet of special significance to a lonely man.

Jack Case came up and squatted beside him, building a cigarette. Teague said quietly, "You're in poor company, Jack."

Case shrugged, and spat. "I've been in poor company. I'm still there, and I don't like it. Caldwell sent out the word that you were through. He's put Bully Girard in your place. You're staying in Bonanza Gulch, Jim?"

Teague nodded. "I'm staying."

"Watch your back," said Case.

Teague swung his head, looked at Case, but Case was staring straight ahead. "You've heard talk?" asked Teague.

"No. But I can read the signs. And there's something else I wanted to tell you. Last night when I came off shift I stopped in at the Big Nugget for a little time before turning in. When I did head up for the cabin, two fellows on horses nearly rode me

down in the dark. They were headin' out of town. I moved back into the dark and they didn't see me, but I got a fair look at them against the stars. George Ides and Curly Bolan."

Teague stiffened slightly. "Sure of them, were you?"

Case nodded. "Positive. I'm wondering."

"So am I," murmured Teague. Again his thoughts reached back to a looted stage standing in the road, of a driver and a shotgun guard lying dead, of a treasure box shot open, of the sign of two horses near by and of an empty revolver shell.

Case got to his feet. "If you hear anything, Jim, let me know. I'm willing to risk my skin in an open, up and down fight for a couple of gold claims, but I've no wish to be tied up with any outfit that is downright murderous crooked. That can lead to a rope around your neck and I'm partial to mine."

Teague said, "I'll let you know."

"You hear about Burge?" Case asked.

"No. But I've been wondering."

"That raid last night really put the fear of the Lord in him. He came sneaking up to the cabin just at daylight, got his gear together and caught a ride out with a freighter heading across the mountains to Alpine. I asked him what the idea was. He said that when the miners began acting in organized bunches it was a good time to get scarce."

"Maybe he was wise," said Teague.

Case spat, rubbed his lips with the back of his hand. "I'm going to watch all signs mighty close."

Case went on his way, and Jim Teague dropped back into the shadow of his thoughts. Sheriff Wade Riker came down the street from the Big Nugget, dark, stone-faced, black-eyed. He gave Teague a slanting glance and turned into the trading post. A moment later Janet Sherrill came along, pretty in the sunshine.

Jim Teague got to his feet, touched his hat. His voice reached across to her, low and quiet. "I still say, don't let Riker get his hands on that injunction. Have a committee of miners serve it."

She did not look at him, but colored and tossed her head slightly as she went by, hurrying into the trading post. Five minutes later she came out and with her was Wade Riker. They went down across town to the Sherrill cabin.

JIM TEAGUE shoook himself and crossed over to the stage station. He found Ben App talking with Barney Foxx, the miner with the rippling black beard and the fierce blue eyes. They broke off in their talk and looked at him coldly. Barney Foxx had a dark and swollen bruise under one eye, and Teague thought that Foxx must have been in on the sluice box raid.

Ben App said curtly, "Have your say and make it brief. I got little time for such as you."

"I'm wondering," said Teague quietly, "if you got a saddle bronc in your corral that you'd consider selling to me—and whether I can meet your price if you have?"

"If I had a thousand such I'd sell none to a Caldwell man," Ben App said.

"I'm not a Caldwell man," Teague said. "I was, but no longer. I want something to ride out of this camp on."

Barney Foxx grinned mockingly. "Find last night a little too rough for you, maybe?"

"No. I've taken whippings before. I see that you were there. I'm wondering if I put that mark on you? I landed a few good ones."

Barney Foxx spat derisively. "I been telling the boys that Caldwell's crowd wasn't near as tough as they let on. Just a bunch of coyotes, trailing after another coyote who thinks he's a wolf. What an awakening he's got coming!"

The wintry bleakness began forming in Jim Teague's eyes, but he held on to his temper. "I wouldn't know about that." He turned to Ben App again. "Then you got no saddle bronc to sell?"

"Not to you—at any price."

Teague shrugged and turned away. At that moment a man stuck his head in the door and called excitedly. "Come a-run-

nin', Ben. Here's Bob Porter, just rode into town, and he's all shot to rags!"

"Bob Porter!" exclaimed Ben App. "The gold messenger, Barney! Good Lord—do you suppose—"

Ben App ran out, with Barney Foxx at his heels. Jim Teague followed them slowly.

Outside a horse had just come to a stop before the stage station. In the saddle a stocky, blunt-jawed figure was humped over the saddlehorn, swaying from side to side, clinging to the horn with bloody hands. At the base of the man's neck and to one side, bright crimson welled from an open wound.

"Bob!" called Ben App. "What happened, man? Here, Barney—give me a hand with him—"

The man in the saddle shook his head with slow, vague swings. His voice was a croak, coming from a great distance. "No! Listen—Ben. They jumped me . . . two of them . . . just after daylight. They were masked . . . hid and waiting along the trail. They started . . . right in shooting. I never had . . . a chance. I don't even remember, how I got away. The light seemed to go out, with their first shot. Next I found myself, still in the saddle, my bronc running. I just hung on and let . . . it run."

The speaker swayed wider, weaving.

Barney Foxx and Ben App reached up, steadying him. "The pack horse—with the treasure?" urged Barney Foxx. "What about that, man?"

That far off croak seemed to move still further away. "Don't know . . . don't know. . . ."

Of a sudden all substance seemed to melt out of the man. He was a limp, sliding bundle when Foxx and Ben App caught him. His head lolled, his arms hung loosely. Jim Teague, who had seen death before, recognized it here.

He watched Barney Foxx and Ben App carry the dead treasure messenger into the stage station, then moved away, heading for the group of Caldwell cabins. He found Moulton and Hamper in one of them. He asked for Jack Case and was told that Case was probably at the Big Nugget, so he headed there.

He found Case sitting at an idle poker table, killing time at solitaire. Teague dropped into a chair across from him. "Keep right on playing, Jack," Jim murmured. "But listen close. . . ."

Case's movements, as he laid down card after card, became slower and more deliberate, as Jim talked. "Two of them, eh?" Jack said softly.

"And there was two of them who'd held up that stage the day I first came in to this camp," nodded Teague.

"I know when I've had a big plenty," said Case. "You're already through with Rupe Caldwell. Now I am. Much obliged, Jim, for telling me. Burge was smart. Wish I'd have ridden that same freight wagon out of town. Where do we go from here?"

A DOOR slammed back. A man at the bar, laughing at some remark the bartender had made, went suddenly silent, his laugh breaking off into a thin, whistling gasp of alarm. Jim Teague looked up.

In the open door of the side room that was Rupe Caldwell's headquarters, stood a hulking, redheaded, red-bearded animal of a man. Bully Girard, his eyes burning crimson with the lust of killing. Just settling against his shoulder was a sawed-off shotgun, the twin muzzles swinging in line with Jim Teague's chest.

Teague's hands were on the edge of the table, as he had leaned forward in his brief talk with Jack Case. So now, in one tremendous surge, Teague threw the table up and over, knocking Case backward out of his chair. With the same move Teague fell sideways out of his own chair, behind the doubtful protection of the upturned table.

The shotgun Bully Girard held roared wickedly.

At this short range the charge of buckshot had little chance to spread, and its compactness would have torn a man almost in half, had it hit. But it did not hit Jim Teague—it hit where he had been, the up-

flipping edge of the table taking the full impact. A gout of splintered wood and shreds of green felt flew upwards. Girard cursed thickly, knowing he had missed, fought the recoil of the shotgun, pulled the uptossed muzzle back into line and down, intending to rake the area close to the floor with the second shot.

The heavy Colt gun in Jim Teague's extended right hand, roared its own challenge. It was a snap shot, pure and simple, calculated to upset and confuse more than to hit fatally. It smashed into Bully Girard's left arm, just below the bent elbow, the blow tearing Girard's supporting hand from the fore end of the shotgun, allowing the muzzle of the weapon to drop and the sagging weight of the gun come fully upon the finger curled around the second trigger.

The gun smashed out in second discharge and the charge of buckshot gouged into the floor not two yards from Bully Girard's feet. Girard dropped the gun, catching at his wounded arm, cursing hoarsely. He tried to dodge back through the door of the side room.

But Jim Teague was up on one knee, now, and shooting with certainty. He drove a slug into the very center of Bully Girard's gross body. Girard swayed and fell against the door post, clawing at it with his sound hand, trying to hold himself erect. Another slug hammered angling into his apelike chest, heart high. Girard tipped away from the support, fell heavily on his face.

Jim Teague was on his feet, dragging Jack Case from under the wreckage of the table. "You all right, Jack?"

"All right. Girard—what set him off?"

Teague did not answer. He was already headed across to the open door of that side room. He leaped over and past Bully Girard's sprawled body without a glance. Now indeed was the icy storm seething and swirling in his eyes. He was set for anything as he went through that door.

The room was empty. Teague whirled back, plugging fresh loads into his gun. At the white-faced, staring bartender, he threw a single harsh, questioning word. "Caldwell?"

The bartender shrugged, licked his lips. "Not here," he croaked. "Left half an hour ago."

"Where?"

"I dunno. He didn't say."

Jim Teague swept the room with a savage glance. Then he prowled out into the street, with Jack Case following him. Case said, a trifle awed, "Man! Now I know why Rupe Caldwell wanted you on his side. He was a fool not to keep you."

"He couldn't keep me," rapped Teague harshly. "Because he's a smooth-talking, crooked, double-dealing whelp. And I want him!"

"You figure he set Bully Girard after you?"

"Of course. There never was any love lost between Girard and me from the first day we met. Yet I've had little to do with him. He'd hardly have set out to get me on his own. Caldwell told me to get out of town—or stay here for good. This was what he meant. Well, we'll see who stays in Bonanza Gulch for good."

Jack Case looked at Teague with slanted glance, saw the frigid tumult in Teague's eyes, the ridged tautness of his face. "I don't blame you for feeling like you do, Jim. But remember, Rupe Caldwell's got quite an organization built up. Maybe the smart thing to do would be to get enough backing to smash the organization first before going after Caldwell."

Teague barked a short, mirthless laugh. "Where'd I get backing in this town? I was a Caldwell man, once, remember. There isn't a decent citizen in Bonanza Gulch who'd trust me as far as he could spit. And I don't blame them."

CASE shrugged. "You can't be sure of that until you try. Caldwell won't be long in hearing that Bully Girard messed up his little chore. He'll know that you'll have all the angles figured, and he'll be doubly on his guard, with men laying for you from all sides. One of them gets you, then Caldwell will be more firmly in the saddle than ever. I'd say that now is a good time to outsmart him."

The first blaze of stark anger was fading a little in Jim Teague, letting the wisdom

of Jack Case's words sink in. He nodded slowly. "I'll try it. But if it don't work, why then I go after Caldwell alone and I'll either get him or he'll get me. What about you?"

"I'm small fry," said Case. "I don't rate much. I'll stick around a while longer, seeing how things are beginning to get real interesting. You get busy. I'll see you later."

Jim went straight to the stage station and was in luck in finding Ben App alone. App began to bristle, but Teague said swiftly, "You and me are going to have a talk, App. I got a proposition to make you."

"Not interested," snapped Ben App. "I'd deal with a rattlesnake before I would a Caldwell man."

"I told you before I wasn't a Caldwell man any longer," explained Teague patiently. "If you want proof of that, find out what happened in the Big Nugget just now."

The stout little stage station keeper stared at Teague with narrowed eyes. "I thought I heard some shooting up that way," he admitted. "What happened?"

"Bully Girard tried to get me with a sawed off shotgun. A sneak play. It didn't work—quite."

"Where's Girard now?"

"Dead. I'm positive Caldwell set him after me. It's in line with the threat Caldwell made when he and I split up."

"What threat?"

Teague told him, and Ben App said, a slight sneer in his voice, "What brought the row on between you and Caldwell? Wasn't he splitting the stake fairly?"

"If you'll listen," Teague said steadily, "I'll tell you."

Again Ben App gave him a long, searching stare. Then he said, "Shoot."

Jim Teague gave him the story briefly. "I was down and out. I needed something to eat, a bunk to sleep in, some decent clothes on my back. The proposition Caldwell made me shaped up more or less as a fight between men over the ownership of some placer claims, the true titles to which were in doubt. I'd done my share of fighting for chunks of cattle range where the ownership was in doubt and this listened something the same. So I took Caldwell's pay and sided with him.

"Well, things happened. I heard things, I saw things. I began to realize that Caldwell had pulled me into something with his smooth talk and big pay. I told Caldwell there were things he was figuring to do that I wouldn't stand for. He knew I was getting wise to him. The open break came when he tore into me because I didn't stop that raid on his sluice boxes. At that, I'd have stopped it if I could, but the odds were such I never had a chance. So the blowup came and well—there it is."

"Interesting," said Ben App drily. "But what do you expect me to do about it?"

"Listen some more." And then Teague went on, telling of his conviction that at least one of the men who pulled the stage holdup along the Bonanza Gulch to Alpine road had been a Caldwell man. He told of George Ides and Curly Bolan being seen riding out of town the previous night.

NOW A REAL gleam of interest came into Ben App's eyes. "That poor devil, Bob Porter, he said there were two of them who jumped him. They could have been Ides and Bolan!"

Teague nodded. "That's what I figured. And my proposition to you is the chance to get the proof of that."

"How'd you go about it?"

Teague shrugged. "The day I hit this camp I heard you say to Wade Riker that horses leave tracks, when you told him to get out and do something about that stage robbery. Well, I agree with you. Horses do leave tracks. In my time I've read a lot of sign, and followed it. I'd like the chance to look over the scene of that gold messenger holdup and see what I could find. To do that I'd need a horse and riding gear."

"When you hit me up earlier today about buying a horse and saddle you said you wanted them so you could get out of this camp," reminded Ben App. "How do I know this all isn't just another approach aimed at the same thing?"

"You believe me," said Teague quietly,

"or you don't. I've put all my cards on the table."

Their glances locked for a long moment. Then Ben App nodded. "I'm going to take the chance. I'm going to believe you, Teague. I've got to believe somebody around here who has a plan and is willing to see it through. Sheriff Wade Riker doesn't seem to be doing any good about making travel safer."

"Riker," said Teague calmly, "is a Caldwell man. With luck, I'll prove that to you, later."

"I've had my suspicions about Riker," admitted Ben App. "But suspicion isn't proof. That's why I been telling Barney Foxx to go slow in trying to stir up the miners too much. For if they got started on a lynching bee there's no telling where they'd stop and there might be some innocent necks stretched. But once we can get positive proof against certain individuals, then I'm all for a miner's court and proper punishment. That's the healthy way to clean up a camp. But I want proof. And you think you can furnish it?"

"I can make an awful good try at it." Teague's mouth set grimly.

"When do you want to leave?" asked Ben App.

"No sense putting it off a minute."

"Good enough. I'll order up a horse and outfit for you."

Ben App went out back and Teague heard him calling orders to a hostler. Then App came back, spread a piece of paper on a table and with a pencil sketched a rude map.

"During the worst of last winter," he said, "Blizzard Pass was blocked with snow. The camp had to eat, so supplies were brought in by pack train over the old Meeker Trail. When we talked over sending a special treasure messenger out we decided to play safe and send him out that way. But it didn't do any good. You saw Bob Porter when he came in."

"Who knew that Porter was making the trip?" asked Teague.

"Outside of Bob himself, just four of us. Myself, Barney Foxx, Tim McCord and Les Jardeen."

TEAGUE stiffened slightly, his eyes narrowing with recollection. "Last night," he said softly. "I was in the Big Nugget. I saw Les Jardeen come in. He went back to the dance floor for one dance. Then he left. I saw the girl he danced with go into Caldwell's side room. When she came out a few minutes later I saw her stop by George Ides, who was lookout at the faro table, and I saw her say something to Ides, who immediately got another house man to take his place, then went into the side room. And later last night, George Ides and Curly Bolan were seen riding out of town."

"My God!" Ben App took a couple of short agitated turns up and down the room. He stopped, staring at Teague. "What time was this?"

"Around ten o'clock."

"We met," growled App, "at nine o'clock. It took us only about half an hour to decide on our plans. Once we had decided, there was no reason for hanging on, but Barney Foxx and Tim McCord did stay, talking over the camp problems with me, until eleven o'clock at least. Les Jardeen left around nine-thirty. We never gave it a thought. I tell you, I can't believe that of Les."

Jim Teague shrugged. "The word got out, didn't it? And there is nothing so convenient as having a spy in the other fellow's camp."

"But Les Jardeen has been living with Duff Sherrill, caring for him while he was laid up. He's the last man in the world—"

"Exactly!" cut in Teague. "The last man in the world to suspect would be the best spy in the world. Ben, there's no telling what some men will do for money."

Ben App's plumb shoulders sagged wearily. "I could damn you," he said harshly. "I always liked Les Jardeen. Get out of here, before you have me suspecting myself."

Teague said, "You'll keep this all between you and me, Ben? You won't tell a soul?"

"Not a soul. If anybody notices you leaving and asks me about it, I'll tell them you offered to buy an outfit to head for

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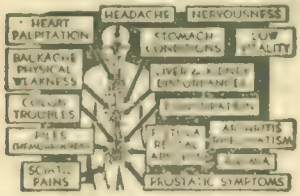

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parts unknown, and I let you have it just to get rid of you."

Abruptly Ben App spun around and put out his hand. "Shake! And good luck."

IT WAS mid-afternoon when Jim Teague found the place along the Meeker Trail where the treasure messenger, Bob Porter, had run into ambush. There was a wild confusion of hoof marks, where startled horses had whirled and spun—where one had dashed off the trail and down into the canyon, with the sign of two other horses racing after it, converging from above and below to head it off.

Teague reconstructed the scene in his mind—the abrupt volley of shots that had sent lead tearing through Bob Porter . . . the pack animal, carrying the gold, spooking and racing down into the canyon, with the two holdups spurring after it, for it was the gold they wanted above all. Apparently they had believed that Bob Porter could not possibly stay long in his saddle, so, when his mount whirled and raced back along the trail, they had made no effort to follow.

Teague put this picture behind him and concentrated on what lay ahead. He found where the holdups had caught up with and cornered the pack horse in the canyon depths. Then there was the sign to follow where, leading the pack animal, they climbed back to the Meeker Trail and turned south along it.

For a good two miles they held to the trail, then cut away from it, up a gloomy side gulch that climbed and climbed toward the lofty rimrock which crested the canyon on the west. The gulch led out of timber into a bleak, grey wilderness of cliff and spire and tangled slide rock. Here the sign grew faint and hard to follow, but Teague was not worried about this, for the conformation of the country right here was such that there was only one place the holdups could have topped the rim.

It was slow, hard going and part of the way Teague left his saddle and went on afoot, his horse scrambling up behind him.

The low westering sun was squarely in Teague's eyes when he finally topped out, but he soon saw his judgment had been correct, for in a little patch of thin and rocky soil not far back from the rim, he saw the hoof marks of three horses, heading west.

The way led out across a stretch of fairly flat tableland, thinly forested with gaunt and storm-stunted timber.

Old instincts were at work in Jim Teague. He traveled more slowly, with ever increasing caution and alertness. He crossed several of these tangled ridges and then, from the crest of another, saw the timber below break away to a little, park-like meadow, at the far side of which a stand of quaking aspen gleamed in the twilight, the leaves a splash of lighter green against the dark bulk of the conifers beyond, and the trunks of the aspens showing silver white. At the edge of the aspens stood a cabin.

There was a small pole corral in back of the cabin, holding three horses. From the rough mud and stick and stone chimney at one end of the cabin, wood smoke was drifting straight up into the still evening air.

JIM GOT out of his saddle, tied his horse in the sheltering timber of the ridge. Among other things which Ben App had furnished him was a rifle, slung in a saddle scabbard. Teague pulled this clear, cracked the action to be certain there was a cartridge in the chamber, then stole away through the timber, his plan being to circle and come in on the cabin slightly to the rear and on the side away from the corral, so as to run no chance of startling the horses.

A single window was on this side of the cabin and it glowed with a faint yellow radiance. Teague reached a rear corner and then sidled softly to the window. It was completely open, no sash or glass of any kind in it, but instead a heavy shutter of split planks that could be slid into place and wedged there from the inside.

Through the opening small sounds drift-

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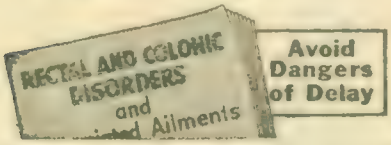

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ed. The occasional shuffle of feet, the clink of cooking utensils, the sputter of frying meat and the savory odor of it drifting through to Teague's nostrils. Teague backed away far enough so the pale inner radiance could not reach him, then sidled to his right. On the far side of the cabin a rude table shelf was built against the wall. Here a candle, stuck into the neck of a bottle, burned palely.

At first Teague could see no one. Then a man's head and shoulders came into view, bending over the table. The man was bearded, shaggy of head. The light of the candle threw his profile into bold relief. His nose was beaked, his eyes deep set under shaggy brows.

His head swung and he growled a summons. There was a creaking and a stir and a second man's head and shoulders moved up to the table. The first, Jim Teague had never seen before, but there was no mistaking the second. Curly Bolan.

For a long minute Jim Teague watched them, fixing their positions exactly in his mind. Then he stole around the cabin to the door. He laid his rifle on the ground, drew his short gun. With the fingers of his left hand he softly explored the door and its latch.

A cold, singing excitement began whipping through his veins, sharpening his every thought and reflex. He crouched, threw strength into a sideways drag on the bar peg. It slid easily, with a soft rattle. The door began to give and Teague threw it wide, coming through with a long leap. His harsh order reached ahead of him.

"Don't move!"

For a split second they obeyed, only their heads jerking up and around. Then Curly Bolan threw himself over the back, his left hand sweeping out as he fell. He knocked the candle over and it sputtered out. Except for the faint glow of a small bed of fading coals on the hearth of the rude fireplace, the cabin was black dark.

A spurt of crimson gun flame lanced the blackness, and the cabin shook to the thunder of report.

BONANZA GULCH

IN A CABIN as small as this one, a man who had lived in it could throw a shot at the door in black darkness and rarely miss. Jim Teague knew this, and for that reason was moving to his right even as the overturned candle flickered and went out. And it was a move that saved his life, for the slug from that first roaring shot whistled through the empty door where Teague had stood, just a breath of time before.

The gun flame had lanced, not from the floor where Curly Bolan had thrown himself, but from the far end of the table where the shaggy headed man had sat. Teague smashed two shots back. The next moment his shifting feet struck a tangle of gear on the floor and he fell, full length, the blunt horns of a sawbuck pack saddle, jabbing against his thighs.

Teague rolled, fighting clear of the tangle, got a knee under him, then sensed, rather than saw the dark bulk of a man diving at him. Teague had no time to shoot, but slapped out with his gun in a warding off motion. Steel clinked on steel and something that stung like the touch of white-hot iron drew a line across Teague's wrist.

Teague knew what it was. A knife!

A curse, thin and venemous, spat at him. Teague threw his left fist, lunging. It struck a man's chest, with some force but not too much, for he couldn't get enough leverage into the blow. Yet it gained him a whisper of time, enough to throw himself ahead and to one side.

He heard the muffled thud of the knife as another driving slash missed and sunk the thirsty blade deep into the puncheon floor of the cabin. Teague reached over and back, smashing hard with his gun. It landed on flesh and got a muffled gasp in answer. Teague struck again and felt a softening resistance sink under the blow.

The cabin was still. On the hearth a coal snapped and to Teague's taut and straining senses sounded loud as a pistol shot. He almost drove a shot in return, but held himself in the nick of time. He found that he was holding his breath and he let it out in a long, sibilant sigh.

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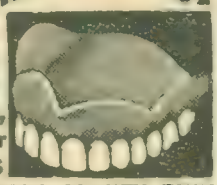

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L. P. HOLMES

The stillness held. There was a warm sliminess seeping across Teague's wrist where the knife had touched. With his left hand he thumbed his pockets for a match, bent, scratched it along the floor and as it sputtered into flame, held it wide at arm's length. It brought no move, no gunfire. But its feeble flame disclosed the huddled figures of two men on the floor.

Relaxation ran over Teague in a muscle easing shiver. He stepped to the table and used the last flicker of the match to relight the candle. With this in his left hand and his ready gun in the right, he made swift examination. The shaggy-headed man, crumpled by the table, was dead. Both bullets Teague had thrown had ripped through his chest, heart high. Curly Bolan was alive but unconscious. He lay with his bullet head sagging down and to one side. Across the base of his neck, slightly to the back lay a long livid bruise, where the barrel of Teague's gun had landed. Inches in front of Bolan's open and relaxed right hand a knife stood straight, the point sunk far into a pine puncheon of the floor.

A gunbelt was about Bolan's waist, holding a holstered gun. Under the stress of desperate emergency, he had made no attempt to go for it, but had turned to the weapon he knew and liked best—cold steel.

Maybe it was his good luck that Bolan had gone for a knife. With a gun, guiding his shots to the lash of Teague's weapon, he might have blasted Teague to death. As it was, even with the knife, he had come close—very close.

Teague reloaded and holstered his gun. In the candlelight he examined the knife wound on his wrist. It was shallow and, while still bleeding, was of no great moment. Teague managed a fair bandage with strips torn from a reasonably clean shirt hanging on a wall peg.

There were three bunks, one above the other against the wall beside the window. Teague dragged Curly Bolan over to the lower one, lifted him on to it, then with more strips of cloth torn from that same shirt, tied him hand and foot. The bushy-

headed man he rolled against the wall, covered him with a blanket.

Curly Bolan was beginning to stir, but was not fully conscious yet. Teague made sure that Bolan's bonds were sound, then began looking over the contents of the cabin. Two riding saddles were stacked in a corner and there was the pack saddle on the floor, which Teague had stumbled and fallen over. Beside it, wrapped tightly in canvas and snugly tied with light strong rope, were two bundles. When Teague went to stir these with a boot toe he found them solid and heavy.

He slashed the cord about one of them, unrolled the canvas covering. Inside were nearly a score of gold pokes, each tagged with the name of an owner. Here, without doubt, was the loot taken from Bob Porter, the treasure messenger. Teague knew that in these two bundles of treasure were thousands of dollars in gold dust.

He remade the bundle he had opened, resumed his search of the cabin, but found nothing more of importance. An old Sharps rifle stood in one corner, and he retrieved from under the table the worn Peacemaker Colt which the shaggy-headed man had used in his single try to get Teague. On the walnut butt the initials A.C. were roughly carved, which meant nothing to Teague, and he was about to toss the weapon aside when he realized the initials might mean something to Ben App.

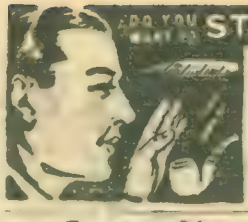
A thin curse came from the bunk where Curly Bolan lay. Teague moved across to him, looked down at the venomous, bullet-headed knife man. "You should have tried your gun, Bolan," said Teague. "You might have had better luck. But, once a knife man, always a knife man, so the saying goes. Who was your friend?"

Bolan's only answer was a curse.

"What became of your partner in the holdup, George Ides?" asked Teague.

Bolan cursed again. Teague shrugged. "You may talk later, Bolan—when they put a rope around your neck. We're heading back to Bonanza Gulch—tonight."

(To be continued in the next issue)



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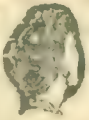

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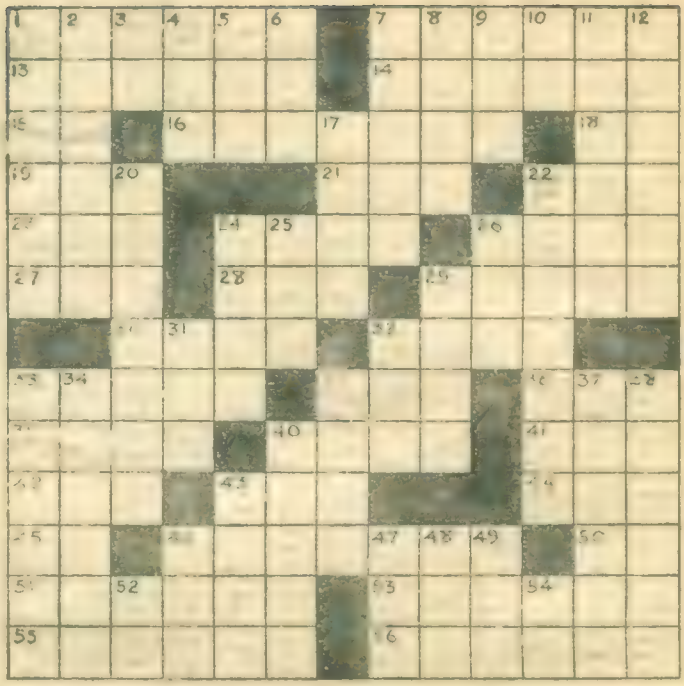
KNOW YOUR WEST

Answers to the questions on page 61

1. The neck, preferably on the left side.
2. Warning of an especially bad or outlaw bronc.
3. Santa Fé, N. M.
4. With quills.
5. Flagstaff, Ariz.
6. He'd been talking with the boss and was very angry.
7. Bottomland Southwestern grass.
8. 'Squatter after three (it's quarter after three).
9. Two.
10. Yes, since it usually weighs 30 to 35 pounds.

THE WESTERNERS' CROSSWORD PUZZLE



The solution to this puzzle will appear in the next issue

ACROSS

1. Saddle bag
7. Feedbag
13. Pressed
14. For each person
15. Therefore
16. Inferred
18. Not off
19. Shanty
21. Light brown
22. Unit of work
23. Peer Gynt's mother
24. To bite away
26. Desire
27. Coop
28. College cheer
29. Morass
30. To cut off
32. Farm building
33. Heir
35. Automobile
36. First woman
39. Related
40. Tenderfoot
41. Evil
42. Native mineral
43. Evergreen tree
44. Small child
45. Otherwise
46. Spotted, as a horse
50. Fifty-one
51. Lasso
53. School book
55. Slopes
56. Western prairie wolf

Solution to Second April Puzzle

DOWN

1. Accident
2. To awaken
3. Behold
4. To finish
5. Golf mound
6. To sum up
7. Large parrot
8. Not shut
9. Free from
10. Concerning
11. Fruits of the oak
12. Longest measure
17. Western state
20. Able to be stretched
22. Eager
24. Broad smile
25. Short sleep
26. Armed conflict
29. Female horse
31. To incline the head
32. Naughty
33. Backless seats
34. Cattle inclosure
35. To restrain
37. Bluish purple
38. Complete
40. Prescribed meals
43. Decree
46. Fastening device
47. Curved line
48. Sign of the Zodiac
49. Twenty-four hours
52. Sun god
54. To accomplish

OUT OF THE CHUTES

For the story of the cowboy who's "Best Dressed in the West," we turn this department over to George Henhoeffer, the popular Arizona writer and newspaperman.

ONE of America's flashiest dressed cowboys is a chesty bull rider and trick horseman who hails from a pocket-sized ranch near Scottsdale, Arizona. When his act goes on in a place like Madison Square Garden, clothes designers are alertly poised with pencil and pad ready to record his flamboyant attire for later adaptation into everything from men's sportswear to lady's dinner gowns.

This reputation for sartorial splendor and originality has earned hard-riding Dick Griffith a wide range of nicknames. He has been dubbed the Sagebrush Lucius Beebe and the Beau Brummell of the Bullpens. His petitely attractive wife, Velma, who designs his costumes, smilingly calls him "top hand in the fashion corral."

Out of the Griffith team has grown a business which nets in the neighborhood of $25,000 a year. Much of the take, of course, comes from Dick's prize money, riding tough, 1,400-pound Brahma bulls, and from his Fireball Jump, a dazzling stunt in which, mounted Roman style, he leaps two horses over a parked automobile. But manufacturers' rights to his costume designs are good for a tidy $3,500 to $5,000 or more a season, depending on how fast they get into production before some observant competitor latches onto the ideas.

When a Montgomery Ward executive caught Dick's performance in a Chicago show, in 1941, he sought out Mrs. Griffith and paid her a fat $1,000 fee just to check the company's catalogue and strike out the Western wear that lacked oomph. Later, after a Madison Square Garden show, a New York dress manufacturer quickly contracted for popularized models of five of Dick's snappiest costumes—mostly appliqued numbers with roguish bolero tops, Mrs. Griffith's specialty—which ultimately grossed $2,000 in 5% sales royalties. Two were grabbed up as feature fashions by national women's magazines, something that now happens frequently with the best Griffith creations.

Such windfalls of publicity are good for business. But there's one kickback. Most editors want Dick to pose in the originals, just as he appears in the arena. "Makes me feel like a clothes horse," he says wryly. "And I don't mean a *whole* horse either."

Almost any wear-resistant quality fabric is satisfactory for the finished outfit, although the first time Dick tried silk he had to rub rosin on his pants' seat to keep from skidding off the saddle. Another near disaster occurred one afternoon in Fort Worth, Texas, when a pair of Griffith-made trousers parted suddenly during a strenuous vaulting straddle at full gallop. Mrs. Griffith promptly developed an innovation she now calls "the double-duty derrière."

The Griffiths, philosophically, have stopped worrying about designers in the grandstand copying their styles. Dick at least always wears the costume first. Last year in New York, Dick was invited to a party for designers and clothes buyers, given by a manufacturer who had his own Western models on hand. All went well until the buyers enthusiastically acclaimed Dick's outfit the most original there. The host had to admit ruefully that—for the moment, at least—it was the one number his firm couldn't offer for sale.

Adios,

GEORGE HENHOEFFER

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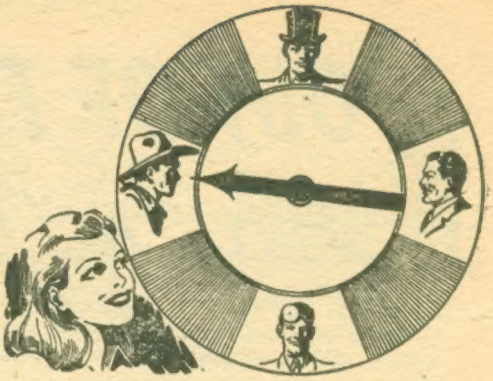

WHOM SHALL I MARRY?

By Professor Marcus Mari

Coralling the Stars

HERE is a fascinating game for astrologists — amateur or professional. Suppose you do not know someone's birth date but know all about his personality traits, can you work backwards and attempt to find out when his birthday was? Let's try it on Sitting Bull. He was born in Grand River, S. D., in 1834 but no one knows what day, or what month.

Now Sitting Bull was a stubborn, opinionated man. He was smart enough and practical enough to make himself a reputation as a great chief. Although he was the head of the Hunkpapa Indians of the Sioux tribe, he wasn't such a hero as he was clever enough to make people believe. For instance, when his tribe was fighting Custer at Little Big Horn, Sitting Bull was far back of the lines making "medicine" against the whites. He was a leader but not a fighter.

He surrendered in July of 1881 (and the dates of the fall and rise of a human are important in this astrological game) but never became reconciled or friendly toward the white man. He had the ability, however, to stimulate the imagination of others. He could dramatize himself with cold and deliberate precision. He fooled a lot of people, even white men, and before his death they gave him credit for being able to write poems in Latin! The truth is that Sitting Bull finally learned to write his own name and no more.

He had a cold, practical, possessive and jealous nature. On the good side, though, he was intensely loyal, powerful and sincere.

These traits add up to the guess that his birthday was somewhere between April 20 and May 20 — a Taurus man.

You may receive a personal reading by sending this coupon to Professor Marcus Mari in care of Ranch Romances, 515 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. ENCLOSE STAMPED AND SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE. (Canadians enclose 3 cents instead of stamp.)

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Date of Birth..... 4-29-49

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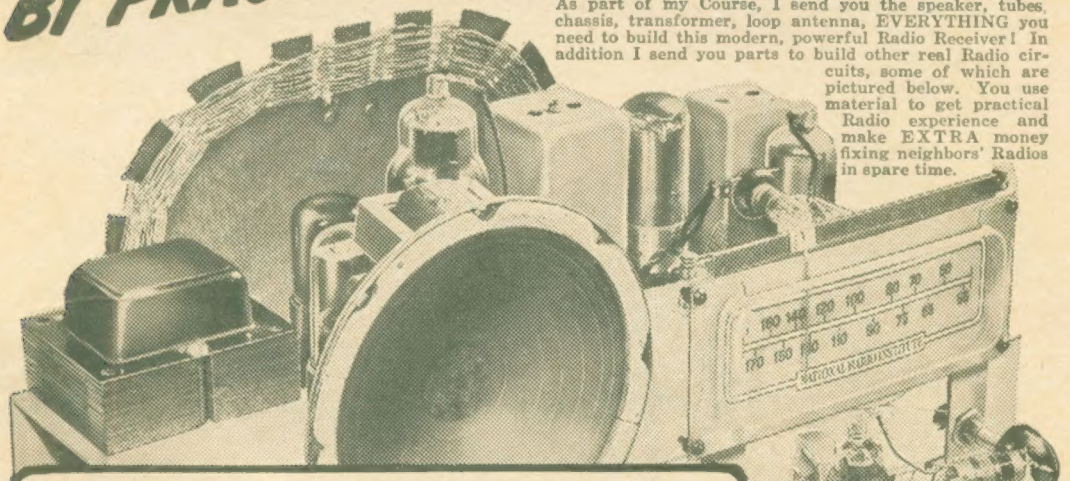

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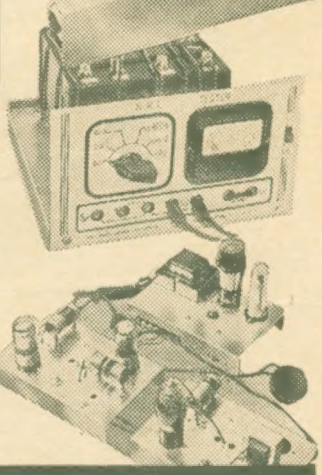

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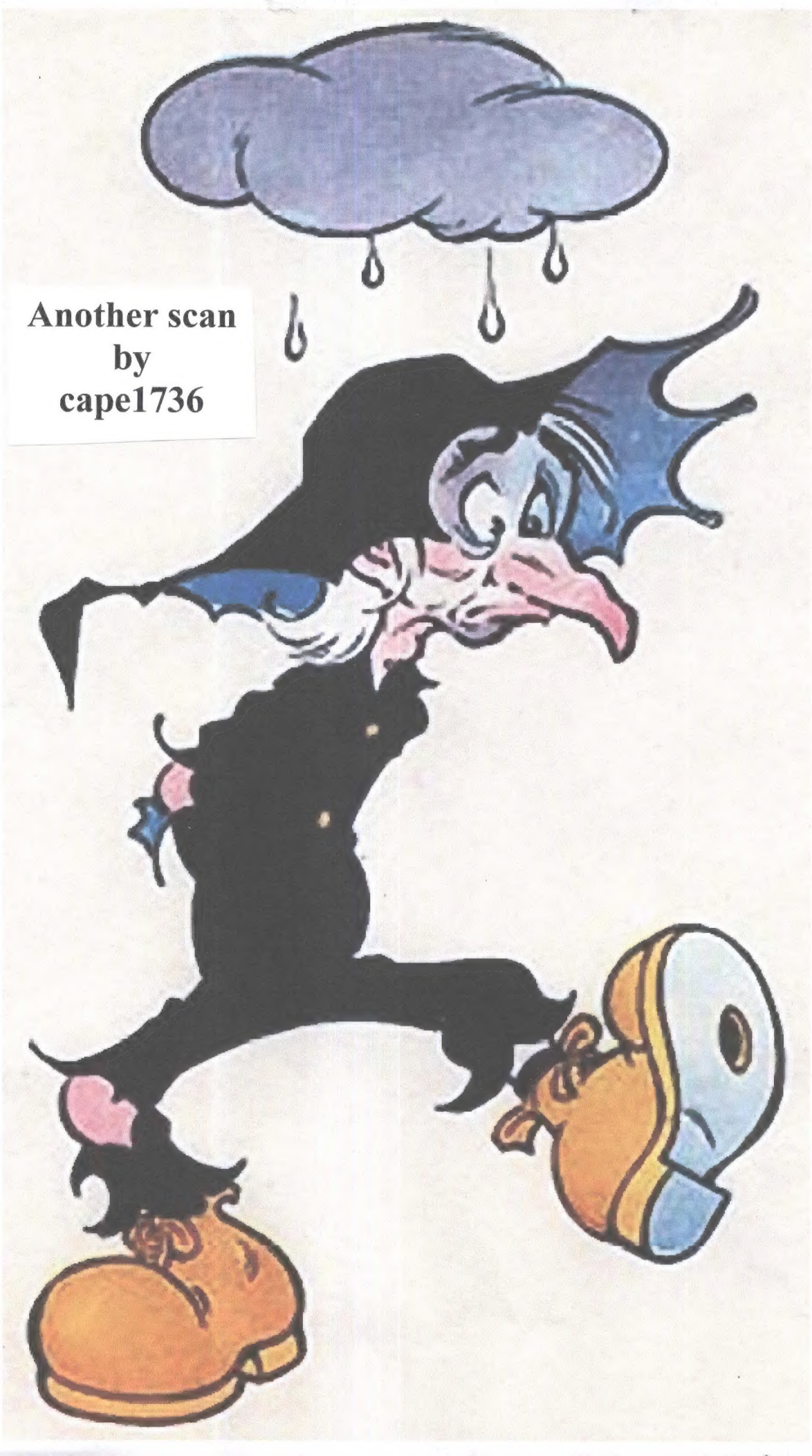
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